

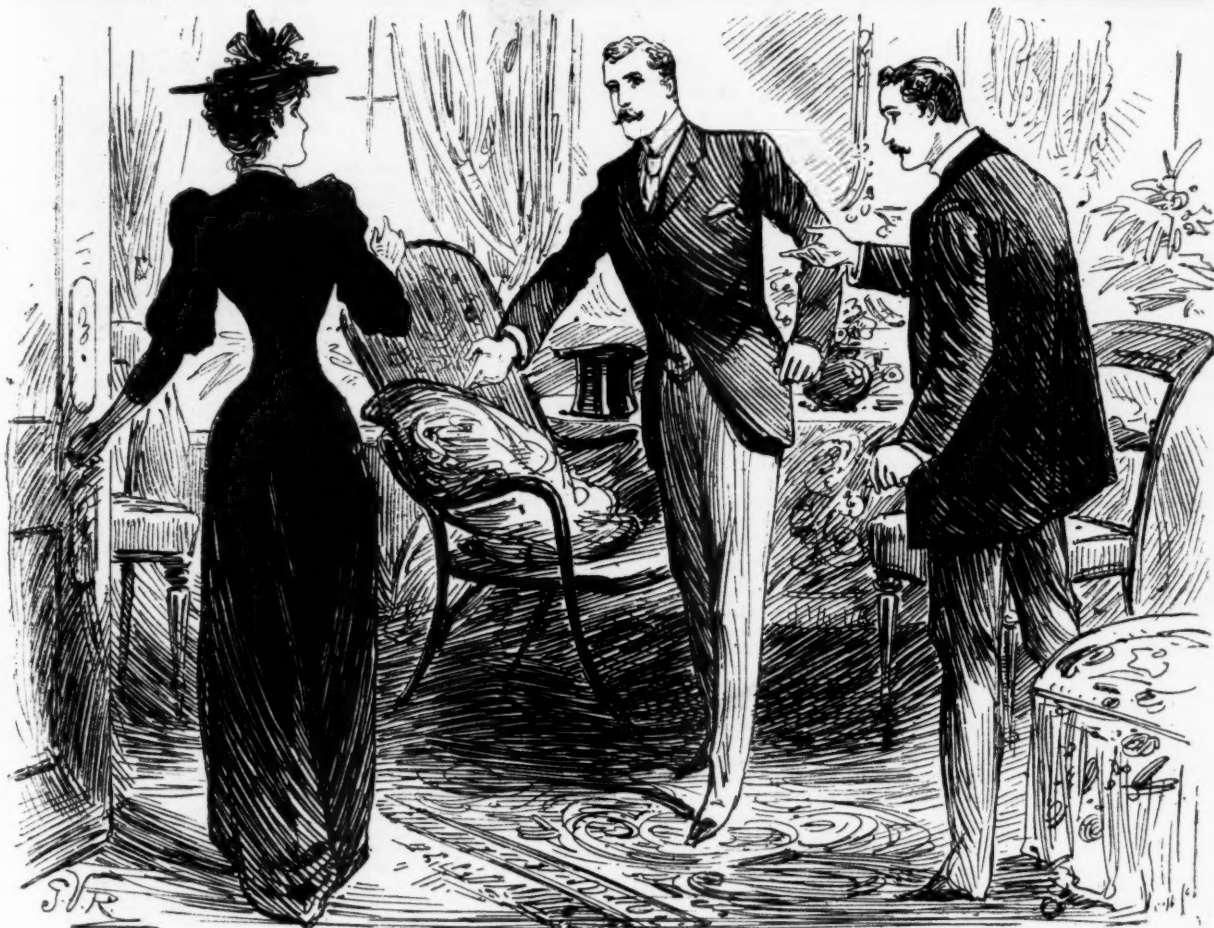
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"COUSIN FORTUNE, THIS IS THE ERIC TO WHOM YOU WERE SO KIND YEARS AGO!"

## FORTUNE'S MISTAKE.

### CHAPTER I.

It was London in July. London just when the close, sultry atmosphere and the baking pavements make people long with an indescribable, weary yearning to get away to some place where they can feel the salt of the sea breeze, or sniff the fragrance of a real country garden.

A girl in the streets was selling bunches of sweet lavender, and their scent reached Fortune Langley as she stood at the corner of Grays Inn-road waiting for her omnibus. She turned away just as it came in sight, found a penny in her pocket and bought some lavender, which she held tenderly in her hand as though its very sweetness recalled some past joy. Then she turned contentedly to walk home, for there were no superfluous coins in Fortune's purse, and the penny paid to the flower girl had been the one intended for her homeward ride.

Fortune Langley was a tall, thoughtful-looking girl of twenty-three, who contrived to be contented, although she earned her own living

and worked tolerably hard to do so. She was a lady born, and showed her gentle birth in a hundred trifling ways; but she never complained that she had not expected to earn her bread, and had only become a working woman because the bank in which her father's savings were invested suddenly stopped payment, killing the old man by the shock and grief, and leaving his children utterly unprovided for.

Fortune only came to London then. She was country born and bred, and even now after years in the busy city, the din of the noisy streets and the rush of the crowd passing to and fro tired her.

She wore a plain dress of summer serge with a snowy linen collar and cuffs; her shady black straw hat was trimmed with lace and poppies. There was nothing remarkable in her attire or in her quick, graceful walk, but her face had a rare charm. People paused to look at it again, it was so true and bright, so strong and womanly.

Fortune Langley had a clear, creamy complexion, and limpid, hazel eyes; her hair was a rich shade of dark auburn, and it had a natural wave which made it go in pretty, feathery puffs, which made a perfect frame for her oval

face. Her features were good and expressive, and there was a great deal of resolution in the mouth, which yet was anything but hard.

"Fortune! Well, this is lucky," and a man a few years older than the girl came quickly up to her. "Are you going home? Let me walk with you!"

"Aren't you earlier than usual, Paul?" and the very tone of her voice was good to hear, it was so clear and musical.

"Yes. I wanted to see you particularly. I was on my way to Guilford-street; but I can talk much better here. Come this way if you aren't in a hurry," and he turned into a side street leading into one of those quiet squares still to be found in the West-central part of London. He waited till they had passed out of the noise and din, and then he said, gravely, "I've got it, Fortune."

"Paul!"

Joy and congratulation mingled in her voice, for the thing that Paul had "got," meant a great deal to them both. He was a literary hack, working hard for a pittance which seemed little in return for his great industry and real ability. He had felt for months it was in him to do great

things, only he was forced to undertake whatever would bring in a quick return, as he depended entirely on his pen. An old friend who believed in his talents had been trying to get him the post of secretary to a nobleman.

Lord Fane was middle-aged and cared nothing for politics; all he wanted was someone to write his letters, look after his splendid library, and keep him posted up on all subjects of the day. He offered two hundred a-year with board and rooms in his own house; but the charm of the post to Paul Hardy was the ample leisure which would give him time to write the novel on which all his hopes were fixed.

"There's only one drawback, dear," he said to his fiancée gently—"leaving you; but in one sense I shall be nearer, Fortune, for this will lead to independence."

"I'm so glad you've got the post, Paul," she said, brightly. "You'll have time for your own book now, and it will be such a comfort to have no anxiety about ways and means while you're writing it; besides, you may make some useful friends."

"I shall not stay at Netherton more than a year," replied her lover, "By that time I shall have made my mark; or, perhaps, Lord Fane would find us a tiny cottage near the Castle, and let me come to him daily."

"That would be delightful," she said, with just a little sigh. "I shall never love this great, terrible London as much as you do, Paul; I am always longing for the country."

"Can't you take a holiday soon, dear?"

"Why, I had one last year; you extravagant boy. Surely you don't think typewriting is so well paid that it rains holidays every summer?"

Paul ground his teeth. Evidently some recollection had annoyed him.

"Fortune, I hate to go away and feel there's no one to prevent your slaving yourself to death. I've a great mind to throw up this berth, and stay in town to look after you."

"Oh, you mustn't!" she said so eagerly he could not mistake her sincerity. "It would grieve me terribly. I'll promise you to take lots of care of myself; besides, I shan't be alone, there's Dene!"

"Worse luck!" said Hardy, adding, as she looked ready to cry at the words, "there, dear, I won't vex you when we are so soon to part; but mark my words, Fortune, you ought not to sacrifice as much as you do to your brother."

"I think you are a little hard on Dene," she said gently, "our reverses were an awful blow to him!"

"He had to leave Oxford," admitted Hardy, "and give up all thought of reading for the bar, but he got a very good situation in a merchant's office. If he'd only stayed there and buckled to with a will, he'd be in a far better position now than I am!"

"The manager was so inconsiderate, he never seemed to remember that Dene was an Oxford man and a gentleman."

"Well, dear, there's something to put up with everywhere. Dene has had four situations in three years; if he goes on changing so often one of these days he'll find no one willing to take him. He pities himself too much. Instead of supporting you, he often lives for weeks on your earnings. It isn't right, Fortune."

"Oh, Dene is working very steadily now Paul, and everyone can't be as persevering as you are, dear!"

Paul Hardy had made the Langleys' acquaintance when they first came to London three years before. For a time he and Dene were chums, then the latter complained Hardy was a dull companion; but Paul put up with the young fellow's ungraciousness, because even then he was in love with Fortune.

They had now been engaged some time, and hoped to be married in another year. Dene ridiculed the whole affair, telling Paul he was a fool to marry on a small income, while he never lost a chance of blaming Fortune for "throwing herself away," for the Langleys came of a very old family, though Dene's only inheritance from his ancestors was their pride.

His gibes fretted Fortune, but never changed her purpose. She loved Paul with all her heart

and strength; she was sorry he and Dene did not get on better, but she had no idea how strong and how deeply-rooted was their mutual aversion.

"When are you going to Lord Fane's?" she asked her lover after half an hour's talk, while they paced up and down the grim old square. They were close to her home, but she would not propose returning there in case Dene should have come in to mar their *tête-à-tête*.

"To-night. I have to meet him at King's Cross at six; he wished me to travel down with him."

"Paul!" there was real dismay in her voice, "it must be nearly four now."

"Well," he answered with a smile, "what then? My landlady is going to let me have a bit of a room at the top of the house to keep such of my belongings as I don't take to the Castle, and a portmanteau or two will hold the rest. All my packing can be done in an hour, and I wanted as long as I could with you!"

"Then we must say good-bye now."

"I am afraid so, dear. I hope with all my heart it is the last long good-bye we shall ever have to say."

Fortune was a brave girl, she kept back her tears by an effort. A hundred things she wished to say came surging through her brain, but she drove them back. She and Paul might not meet again for many weary months. She would not let their last moments together be troubled by anxious discussions. She talked brightly of her lover's future, and of the book which was to make him famous, and when the time came for farewell, she could still smile at him with her sweet, true eyes.

"I shall not tell you to remember me, Paul, for I could not forget you, and I expect you feel the same."

"I shall never forget you while I live, my darling!" said the strong man, huskily. "Just as I shall love you till I die! Fortune, if any trouble comes, dear, send for me. Remember you belong to me, and I have a right to share your sorrows!"

Despite the sultry summer heat, the bright July sunshine, Fortune shivered at his words. Did any presentiment of the awful cloud, soon to break over her horizon, come to her, or was it only the natural pain of saying good-bye to her lover?

"I will be sure to send, Paul; and you must write to me often, dear, and tell me all you do."

So they parted, those two who loved each other, poor souls, more than ought else on earth; and who, little as they guessed it, were soon to be parted by a barrier more dreadful than mere distance.

There was no one to tell Fortune the next time she saw Paul she should tear herself from his embrace, and he would reproach her as a heartless deceiver.

## CHAPTER II.

FORTUNE and her brother lived in Guilford-street, in one of the shabbiest and most dingy of the many lodging-houses which are to be found there. Unlike Dene, his sister was forbearing; she put up with many shortcomings, both in the matter of furniture and attendance, because the landlady was a civil, honest woman, and Fortune—who, when she first came to London, had a great dread of the people she should find there—was terribly afraid of falling into the clutches of some virago, such as are often described graphically in fiction.

The Langleys had a sitting-room and two bedrooms, and were known to Mrs. Cox and her satellite the "girl" as the "Second floor." They paid a pound a week, which included everything. Rooms might possibly have been got cheaper farther out; but time was money to Fortune, as most of her work came from Chancery-lane and the region near the Temple, she was glad to be within a walk or at most a penny ride of those localities.

She turned homeward when she had parted from Paul, but she did not hurry; perhaps she knew nothing very pleasant awaited her. Gener-

ously as she had defended her brother to her lover, there were times when she felt terribly anxious about him, and her heart echoed every word of Mr. Hardy's warning, for Dene was not only one of those people who do not "get on," but he seemed to have not the smallest objection to leaning on others.

He was a handsome young fellow, with—when he chose—very pleasant manners and winning ways, but he considered his own comfort above all else, and never seemed to realize no one could go through the world without putting up with something.

His first situation had been found for him by one of his father's friends, which meant, when Dene threw up the post, Mr. Ward and his family washed their hands of him; the second no one could blame him for leaving, as the work was terribly hard, and the pay low; the third Fortune regretted very much, for it was in an accountant's office, and would have meant a permanent post; but Dene declared figures made his head ache, and that he should go blind if he spent his days poring over them.

Just at present he was in an auctioneer's and estate agent's, earning two guineas a-week. The hours were from ten till five, which suited lazy Dene down to the ground, but Fortune had fears Messrs. Willoughby & Son might, in time, consider her brother above his business.

Upstairs, half wearily, plodded the girl, slowly; for she was in no particular haste to meet her brother. Indeed, she took off her hat and smoothed her pretty hair before she even entered the sitting-room where, it being five o'clock, she expected to see tea ready.

She found Dene sitting at the open window, and puffing away at his pipe. There was something in his expression which rather alarmed her, though his greeting was cheerful enough.

"You're awfully late, Fortune. I've been expecting Hardy in to enquire after you; it must be past his usual time on Saturday."

"Paul won't be here for a good many Saturdays," replied Fortune, ringing for the tea-pot, and in a few words explaining her lover's prospects.

"Well, some people have wonderful luck," said Dene, discontentedly. "Such a post would have suited me down to the ground, and you must confess, Fortune, I am much better fitted for a nobleman's companion than your worthy Paul, who, with all his virtues, is only the son of a London tradesman."

Fortune passed over the slight to her lover.

"I don't think you would care to live in a quiet country place, Dene; you would find it dull, besides, you are just settled down at the Willoughbys."

Dene played with his moustache, then drank off his tea as though to gain time before he said, leisurely,

"You may as well know it sooner as later, Fortune; I've left the Willoughbys."

Poor Fortune! She put down the common brown tea-pot with a nervous jerk, and looked full at her brother.

"Left Mr. Willoughby, Dene! Why it's only three months since you went there!"

"Don't stare at me as though I were a monster," said Dene, sharply. "Young Willoughby doesn't know how to treat a gentleman. Why, he actually expected me to go and show some people over a house to-day. They were in a desperate hurry and couldn't bring the key back to the office, it seems, so he actually tried to send me, just as though I were a servant!"

"You are Mr. Willoughby's servant, in a sense, so long as you take his money," said Fortune, gravely. "Do you mean that you refused to go?"

"Rather! I told Dick Willoughby I was engaged as clerk, not errand-boy."

"And what did he do?"

"Escorted the elderly couple himself. I'm sure they were two of the greatest objects—regular country cousins—only fit for Noah's ark. When Dick got back he had a confab with his father, who only came in just after he'd started, and if you'll believe me, Fortune, old Willoughby told me he couldn't have clerks who wouldn't obey orders; he handed me four guineas, saying



the two extra ones were instead of notice, and that I need not trouble myself to come to the office again."

"Dene!"

"Now, Fortune, don't take on; there are heaps of better situations to be had, and I'm sure to get something soon. It really was absurd, you know, to try to turn an Earl's cousin into an errand boy."

"An earl's cousin!" for once, Fortune lost her temper. "How many times removed?"

"Well," said Dene, gravely, "I suppose, as a fact, Lord Carlyon is our third cousin, but considering he lived with us for years when he was a youngster, it seems a great deal nearer. Don't you think, Fortune, it's odd he's never taken any notice of us in all this time? It must be a dozen years since he left the Rectory."

"He was only Eric Langley, then, with very little chance of coming into the title," said Fortune. "I suppose when he left us and found himself a boy viscount he forgot his humble relations."

"I think you're hard on him," said Dene. "Of course his grandfather left him under guardians, and they sent him abroad to a foreign school, and since that he's been travelling all over Europe. I don't believe, Fortune, that old Eric has spent a year in England since he left us."

Fortune wondered what had made Dene's mind run on his noble kinsman; she thought it would have been more profitable if he had studied the advertisements in the daily paper.

"Oh, bother!" said Dene, when she suggested as much, "there's plenty of time for that. Wouldn't it be jolly if Eric invited us down to his place? He's come home, you know. Just listen to this,—"

And he proceeded to read a paragraph from a society paper which stated that "the young Earl of Carlyon, after a protracted residence abroad, had returned to England, and would shortly entertain a large house party at Carlyon Court."

"It won't make any difference to us," said Fortune, "we are not likely to see him."

Perhaps she was a little sore on the subject, for she could remember Eric Langley's coming to the old vicarage, a boy of eight, who had lost both his parents and depended entirely upon the charity of his grandfather, General Langley, a very poor man, who had retired on half pay, and was much inclined to resent the burden of his son's orphan. The General remembered his cousin Percy "took pupils," and was content to leave Eric in his care for five long years, paying but a very meagre pittance. Then a series of unexpected deaths promoted the old soldier to be Earl of Carlyon, and made the thirteen-year-old boy, Viscount Langley.

The Viscount was removed from the Rectory at once, and, for what reason no one could fathom, was sent abroad. The new Earl never remembered the country clergyman, but made two shrewd lawyers his grand-on's guardians.

Both Dene and Fortune had written at first to Eric, but Germany seemed a long way off, and foreign postage was expensive—positively, until she read that paragraph in the paper, Fortune had not thought of the young Earl for years.

"It's awfully hard lines," said Dene, discontentedly. "Why should Eric have ten thousand a year, while I have to toil from morning till night for a miserable pittance, and all because his great-grandfather happened to be a few years older than mine?"

Fortune got up and laid one hand affectionately on Dene's shoulder.

"Don't think about Eric, dear; it will only make you feel desponding. After all it is nobler to earn a fortune than to inherit one."

"You're only a girl," he said, pettishly, "and you can't understand. I may be late to-night, don't sit up for me," and before she could remonstrate he had taken up his hat and left the room.

Fortune sighed. The prospect looked very blank. When in work Dene paid her a pound a week for his share of their modest expenditure. A share which certainly left her no margin of profit. How was she to manage if it took longer than he thought to obtain a situation? It did

not seem to Fortune that she could work much harder, and yet what was to be done?

She had got out her work and sat down to an evening's copying, when the door opened, and a girl of about her own age came in. Chrissie Seymour lived in the same house as the Langleys, and, like Fortune, earned her own living. Her profession was teaching dancing, and she made such a good thing out of it that she occupied the "drawing-rooms," and was thus the grandest of all the lodgers in the esteem of Mrs. Cox. During the three summer months Miss Seymour mostly took things easy. Winter was her harvest, bringing in enough to make her mind easy as to things pecuniary for the rest of the year.

She was just the opposite of Fortune. A small, vivacious little person, with black hair and sparkling black eyes. They were close friends, and Miss Seymour often slipped up to spend an hour with the second-floor.

"Put away your writing," she said authoritatively. "You look tired to death. Do you know I have received special direction from a certain person to look after you? I met Mr. Hardy this morning, and I promised not to let you kill yourself quite if I could help it."

It was seven o'clock. Fortune yielded to temptation; she put away the work, and sat down with her friend close to the open window.

"Cheer up," said Chrissie, gently. "Why, Fortune, it's not like you to be downcast when you know it's for your sake chiefly Mr. Hardy has gone away."

"I know; but oh, Chrissie, I do miss him so, it seems so blank without him."

"But you've got the thought of the future to cheer you up," said Chrissie, in a tone of reproof. "Just think of other girls, Fortune, who haven't got a lover—or who have one they can't trust."

"Poor things," said Fortune slowly. "Yes, I know I am foolish to fret. Paul will be as true to me at Netherston as he was here; only, Chrissie, I had a piece of bad news just as soon as I got home, and it seemed to me as though it were the beginning of a long chain of disasters."

"Nonsense," said Chrissie, practically. "What was the bad news, by the way?"

And Fortune told her.

Miss Seymour shook her head.

"I don't want to be unkind, but I'm awfully afraid your brother will live to be sorry for leaving Mr. Willoughby. We're nearly in August, and that's the worst time of the year for getting anything to do; besides, it seems to me Mr. Dene wants a situation just made on purpose."

Fortune sighed.

"We can only just manage as it is, Chrissie. Don't think me a coward, but I quite dread the future."

The dancing teacher stroked her friend's hand caressingly.

"I wish you'd go away and leave him," she said, earnestly. "Mark my words, Fortune, your brother will never keep a situation while he has you to fall back upon, and knows that if he is out of work for a month or two you will keep the home together. He's older than you and a man besides. Why don't you leave him to shift for himself?"

Fortune shook her head.

"I couldn't do it, Chrissie. So long as I am of any use to Dene I must stay with him."

Chrissie shook her head.

"And kill yourself in his service. Pray, what would Mr. Hardy say?"

"It hasn't come to talking of killing yet," and poor Fortune tried to speak cheerfully. "Dene may get another situation very soon."

"He may," agreed Miss Seymour, grimly, "but the chances are he won't."

After that she banished the subject of Dene and talked of the bright future when Paul Hardy's book should have made him famous, and he could make a home for his sweetheart; and finding praise of Paul the most acceptable cordial to Fortune, that artful Chrissie lauded the young secretary until really you would have thought there never had been such a genius known before. And the result of all this was

that Fortune went to bed a very happy girl with the worst of her fears dispelled.

But alas! those fears were to return as July faded into August, for Dene could hear of no employment, or, to be correct, could find none. After three weeks of enforced idleness, he really did rouse himself to try for a situation. He answered advertisements; he called on acquaintances he thought likely to help him; but though time after time he got as far as an interview with possible employers, nothing ever came of it. Men looked doubtful when they heard he had had four situations in three years, while the fact that he could not refer them to Mr. Willoughby finished things.

"I shall have to go into the workhouse," he said bitterly to Fortune. "Well, it can't be much worse than the fare you have treated me to lately. I'm sure it's semi-starvation. Why can't you get proper meals, and leave the rent till better times come?"

But in that one thing he could not move her. She would work for him far into the hours of the night, she would deny herself of everything like luxury, but not even for her brother would she run in debt.

"Fortune, this can't go on," said the pretty little dancing mistress, drawing her friend into her own sitting-room one summer afternoon. "You are beginning to look like a ghost; you are just killing yourself with work."

"I shan't have the chance much longer," said Fortune sadly. "You know it's the long vacation; two of my best customers told me to-day they should have no more work for me till October."

"And I have no pupils till the middle of September, and I mean to go away to the sea for a month just to set me up for the winter. Fortune, you must come with me; I shall enjoy my holiday ten times more, and as business is so slack you can manage to leave town."

"I could leave town perfectly," Miss Langley confessed, "but I can't accept your invitation, kind as it is."

"You are so proud! Why, I tell you it is for my own sake, because I want your companionship. Besides, wouldn't you share your pleasures with me?"

"It's not pride, Chrissie," said poor Fortune, wistfully. "I should not mind owing you a favour, and I think a whiff of the sea and the sight of some country lane would give me new life; but I can't leave Dene."

Miss Seymour tried again.

"Fortune, if you get ill you won't be able to work for him. Do give yourself this rest, just to please me."

"I would, dear, I would, indeed, but I do not dare. He has grown so moody and irritable lately, I am sure Mrs. Cox would give him no ice if I were not here to smooth things; and, Chrissie, I am afraid Dene would not be economical. If I were away he might run into debt. Just fancy what I should do if I came home and found a roll of unpaid bills."

Chrissie gave up the effort, but she kept Fortune to tea that afternoon, and from the solid edibles which graced the table it seemed Miss Seymour required a very substantial meal at five o'clock; cold ham and chicken, to say nothing of eggs, pound cake and jam. The dancing mistress partook liberally of all these dainties, so that Fortune might not suspect that they had been brought forth solely for her benefit, and that a cup of tea and a biscuit was her friend's usual afternoon repast.

When she got upstairs again, Fortune found Dene finishing off a letter. She supposed he was answering another advertisement, but asked no questions; only she was a little surprised he should go out at once to post it.

The next day, to Fortune's dismay, Dene made no attempt to continue his search for employment. He would not even look at the columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, and when she herself pointed out to him one or two desirable advertisements he refused point blank to answer them.

"What's the use? the fools only want a quill-driver, they wouldn't take a gentleman. I tell you, Fortune, I am weary of the struggle, and I've given it up. I must go to the workhouse, I suppose."

Fortune wondered, in that case, what was to become of them. She had exactly three-and-sixpence in her pocket, with no prospect of more till next week; this was only Tuesday. The rent was paid, but there were a dozen other things demanding money. How they were to "get over Sunday" she could not think.

Be it observed, "to get over Sunday" is the most serious difficulty in a hand-to-mouth existence. Certain things *must* be bought and paid for on Saturdays which to the "hard-up" becomes a veritable day of torture.

She had only to write to Paul, Fortune knew, and he would send her help, but not till she was reduced to the last extremity would she take that step.

Lord Fane was to pay his secretary quarterly, so Paul might not have more in hand than he required to meet the expenses of the first three months; besides, Fortune hated to take alms from the man she loved.

Chriassie Seymour, again, was tolerably well off, and certainly would not refuse to lend her friend five pounds, or even ten. But Fortune shrank from it; it seemed to her she and Chriassie could never be as much to each other if any money came between them.

There was but one thing left, she must make money for present needs by sacrificing some of the few relics of brighter days remaining to her.

Fortune had few valuables; no "jewels" as ladies would count such things, but there were a few ornaments which had belonged to her mother, and she had still put away a quaint, melon-shaped silver tea-pot which had been a wedding-present to her parents from the then Earl of Carlyon.

She decided this would be the best for her purpose; it had never been used since they came to Guilford-street, being too precious to trust to the little maid's rough handling. It was large and massive; Fortune had a vague idea silver was sold by weight, and if so its being old-fashioned would not detract from its value.

She said nothing to Dene of her purpose, but when she left him sulkily smoking that morning after his cruel allusion to the workhouse, she carefully packed up the tea-pot, put a thick veil over her hat, and left Guilford-street a little before eleven o'clock.

She took an omnibus to Chancery-lane, for there was a large shop in the neighbourhood of the Strand where she hoped to dispose of the relic. She meant to sell it outright. She could probably get more than if she pawned it, and to the girl's mind there was no disgrace in selling something she had no further use for, though to borrow money on it would have seemed like sacrilege.

It was a very handsome establishment which she presently entered, and a girl was standing before the counter, evidently complaining of a diamond bracelet which she had just handed to the assistant.

Fortune could catch the words "paltry," "insignificant," and the man's civil protest that "the bracelet was a tasteful and chaste ornament, and had been selected by the Earl himself."

"The Earl likes what I like," said the lady, haughtily. "I told him I should return the bracelet to you and exchange it for one which pleased me better."

The assistant bowed.

"We are perfectly willing to exchange the bracelet, madame, for one of similar value. Should you choose one of a higher price, it might be necessary to consult Lord Carlyon."

Lord Carlyon! The name carried Fortune back to past days, and the life at the Rectory, when Eric and Dene were as inseparable as twins, and always in mischief.

Well, that was all over now, and their fates were wide enough apart. One was a penniless clerk "out of work," the other an English nobleman, able to buy diamonds for a friend.

Was she a friend, or something more?

Fortune looked at the girl again and noticed that she was very pretty. But the face did not please Miss Langley, though it might have been considered lovely. It was to Fortune's mind a trifle hard, and the colour in the cheeks seemed almost too vivid to be natural. She had no time

for further reflections, when an elderly man came forward and asked her business.

"I wished to know if you would purchase this." And she blushed crimson as he carefully opened the parcel and examined the teapot. But she forced herself to say,—

"It is real silver, but old. We have had it nearly thirty years."

The man looked at it critically, and said, civilly,—

"That shape has come into fashion again now, ma'am, and all the rage. I can see this has been taken great care of. I had better just mention the matter to Mr. Fletcher, but I am pretty sure he will give you twenty pounds for it." It was more than she had dared to hope for. She almost trembled with relief.

"Twenty guineas" was the assistant's offer, when he returned from consulting the proprietor. "But I was to ask you your name and address, ma'am. It's customary in these transactions."

Fortune gave both quietly, though she felt ready to sink into the earth with shame; for she gathered, of course, the questions were asked as a security in the case of stolen property. She was thankful when three bank-notes and a little pile of gold were handed to her, and she could escape from the shop into the open air.

Twenty-one pounds! It would enable her to hold out for nearly three months. By that time, even if Dene had not found a situation, she herself would be in full work again. But how tired she felt. Her legs seemed to tremble under her as she walked. She felt as though the busy Strand with its crowd of passers-by were whirling round her. Could she be going to be ill? Was her strength giving way?

It was only a month since she had heard the woman crying "sweet lavender" in the street, and longed for the places where sweet lavender grew. Only a month since she had parted from her lover, happy in the thought of his success. And now she felt years older—a troubled, anxious woman, instead of a high-spirited girl.

It was not poverty alone, though that had tried her sorely; not overwork alone, though she had often sat up copying till the small hours of the morning. Both these things had left their mark on her, but they had not tried her so sorely as the fear fast growing into certainty that her only brother—the who had been her father's joy and pride—was on the downward path.

Fortune changed one of the sovereigns at a pastrycook's, and had a glass of wine and a biscuit. But she still felt too ill to walk home. There was no omnibus in sight, so she called a cab, and resolved on the extravagance of a shilling fare to Guilford-street.

She got out at the corner, walked up to Mrs. Cox's house and entered with her latch-key, just as she had done hundreds of times before. But the little maid met her in the hall.

"There's a gentleman upstairs, miss. He came just after you went out."

A deadly, faint feeling of fear crept over Fortune. Who could possibly have called and remained over an hour? It must surely be a creditor. She knew Dene had many such; guessed it by the ominous blue envelopes which came for him, and whose contents often drew from him a curse.

But Fortune Langley was no coward. What had to be endured would be none the easier for waiting. And so she walked upstairs and opened the sitting-room door with a sudden jerk, just because she knew if she hesitated her courage might fail.

But no terrible scene, no angry altercation awaited her. Dene sat in his favourite chair, with, positively, a smile on his face; while opposite him was a stranger, whose expression was full of friendship, and whose dark blue eyes seemed to Fortune to have something oddly familiar in their depths.

"Here she is," cried Dene, rising, with the air of one about to perform an important introduction. "Fortune, this is our kinsman, Lord Carlyon."

But the stranger interrupted him.

"Cousin Fortune, this is the Eric to whom you were so kind years ago."

(To be continued.)

## FOR VIOLET'S SAKE.

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### CHAPTER III.

#### A SLANDEROUS LETTER.

THERE was no church-going from Faircliff Abbey that Christmas Day.

The cheerful decorations brought no brightness. Mrs. Raymond broke the terrible news to her daughter, in her tenderness and love omitting all mention of Mr. Godfrey's offer for her hand, which, she felt sure, would deeply distress her; and, after having tried to cheer her mother with hopeful words, Madeline crept away to her own room to bear the blow as best she could; looking with tear-blinded eyes out over the restless ocean, with the knowledge that even that sad pleasure would now soon be denied her.

Mrs. Raymond heard the departing footsteps of Mr. Godfrey's horse, and made her way to the library, softly opening the door.

Her husband was sitting in an utterly dejected mood, but he looked up at her and tried to smile.

"Well, wife," he said, drawing a chair close to his side for her use, "I suppose every one must expect to have the downs as well as the ups of life in this world. We have had a good share of sunshine. The woman cannot always be outside in the weather-glass."

"I do not complain, George," she answered affectionately, "and if it were not for you and Madeline, I should not so much mind. But oh! my dear, I wished so for her youth to be happy, and your old age peaceful."

"Yes," he answered sadly, "it will be a wrench for me to give up the old home. Much as you love it, I love it more still, for I was born within its walls. I wonder what my poor father would say if he could know that it was to pass into the hands of strangers?" and he sat long in gloomy reverie.

Then he looked up at his wife. "My dear! must it be?" he asked. Godfrey has made me the most generous offers; will not Madeline give up this youthful fancy of hers, and listen to reason?"

"George," answered his wife with deep emotion, "did you consider my love for you a youthful fancy? What would you have felt had I given you up to marry a richer man, as my father wished me to do? Put yourself in your child's place, dear, and tell me, can you even wish to see her so fickle? She loves Cecil Vernon, and could not be happy as the wife of another. We have had our day, George; let her have hers," she ended earnestly.

Mr. Raymond still loved his wife dearly, but he had outgrown romance.

He had so long been making money his primary object in life, that he could not feel as he had done twenty years ago, and as his wife felt still.

"Yes! yes!" he answered impatiently. "Every dog has his day; but surely it would really be better for Madeline to marry well, and to have all the pleasures which riches can bring her, than to eat out her heart in poverty, waiting long, weary years for happiness, which, after all, may never come to her."

"Do not say that, George; it would break my heart to think that my beautiful bud would never blossom. She was made for sunshine."

Madeline entered as her mother was speaking. "You are talking of me," she said with a loving smile. "But if the sun be denied me, you will find, mother, that mine is no butterfly existence," she said bravely. "I shall love Cecil while I live, and that very love will make me strong—strong for him, and strong for you. In my happy youth, I have had every whim, save one, indulged—and, dear father, I am ready to believe that what you did, you meant for the best—indeed it has so been proved. Had Cecil depended upon a fortune from me, his disappointment would have been great, and now he is working hard to make his own way in the world, and he will return a more perfected character. In the meantime, I am young and strong, and I will work for you both," and she extended a hand to each with a loving gesture.



Her mother looked at her fondly, but Mr. Raymond with pity.

"Madeline," he said, "you are acquainted with the bright side of life only; you do not know the world as it is; I can think of no work for which you are fitted, gently nurtured as you have been."

The girl got up and gazed at herself in the mirror over the mantel-shelf.

"Fit for nothing!" she exclaimed, with a voice full of disbelief. "Father, I cannot think it possible; see how strong I look, strong and young."

"Ay, and beautiful," he said with a sad smile. "There must be plenty of work to be found in London."

"No, child, London, in our altered circumstances, is no place for you."

"I have a voice, father; I can sing," she persisted.

"Even if I would allow you to become a professional singer, you would require years of training," he answered irritably.

"Well, I can paint."

"So can thousands who are unable to keep the wolf from the door."

"And I can sew."

"Yes, yes, child, the song of the shirt is the saddest tune of all! No, Madeline, you cannot help me thus, not thus; but oh! my darling," he continued with feeling, "if you could forget that glimpse of Love's young dream, and become the wife of a man of whom your parents would approve, then, indeed, you could not only help, but save us from ruin, and all our difficulties would pass away like summer clouds."

Madeline regarded him inquiringly.

"You are joking, father," she said, at length; "you do not mean this?"

"Things are too serious with me to admit of any joke," he returned, almost sharply. "I am in sober earnest; I have had an offer for your hand, a kind and generous offer, coming at such a moment. If you will but accept it, I shall retain my present position in the world with a wealthy partner to back me up, I shall remain with your mother in the home I love, and all will be well with us. Child, it may seem a sacrifice to you at first, but time will reconcile you to your lot in life, and the earnest love of a kind husband who is willing to do so much for your sake, and the sake of those near and dear to you, will make you happy."

A great trembling seized upon the girl, and she answered, with suppressed emotion,—

"And you ask this of me, father—you who have had the love for twenty years of a woman who is but little lower than the angels! Has not that taught you the sacredness of such affection that you should wish me to barter mine for gold, for comfort, for a home, even for yourself?" Then her eyes gathered fire, and her voice passion. "Oh! father," she continued, eloquently, "happy as I was in my childish innocence, I never lived until I loved Cecil. I only existed—people exist with even broken hearts, but I could never live without him. Be patient; things may not be so bad as they now seem. Let us do what is right, and all may yet be well. Had I never known love, and felt its elevating power, I might have been content to do this thing to please you—but now, father, father, I cannot!"

"You do not even inquire whom I wish you to marry," said Mr. Raymond in surprise.

"Why should I do so? whoever it may come from, I cannot accept the offer. Cecil is the one man in the world for me, be the others whom they may."

"Nothing, then, will change you? you will see me heart-broken and a beggar?" he replied, coldly.

"Father, spare me!" cried the girl in an agony of mind. "If the sacrifice were of myself alone, I might bear it, but I cannot ruin Cecil's faith in all the world. He loves me, he believes in me, he trusts me. How could I thus deceive him?"

Mrs. Raymond could bear the scene no longer. She rose and clasped her daughter in her arms.

"My darling, you could not—we do not wish it—your father does not really wish you to do

it!" Then she turned to him, and taking his hand, she looked earnestly in his face, and pleaded with him. "George, tell her that you do not—do for my sake, and for our love's sake."

Then she continued with deep agitation, "Husband, do you remember how we walked together under the scented lime-trees in my father's old garden? I think I can see it all before me still. The peaceful Vicarage, and the church close by—I can smell the fragrance of the blossoms even now, although it is more than twenty years ago, and the words you then said still echo in my heart. George, can you not remember them too? Yours were the first words of love which were ever whispered to me, and although another and a richer man asked my father for my hand—yours have been the last. And my heart was too full to answer you, so I just nestled in your arms. And then the bells rang out from the old church tower, and you said it was a happy omen—and oh! my dear, have we not been happy together? And now shall we deny our child to be the same?" she ended with deep emotion, and Mr. Raymond was strongly affected.

He was a thoroughly good-hearted man, but his feelings had been worked upon with subtlety by that tempter, Mr. Godfrey. Neither his wife nor his daughter were aware how completely he was in the man's power.

He had advanced large sums to stave off what had appeared to be temporary difficulties; but the better part of his nature had been touched by his wife's gentle words, and was once more in the ascendant.

"Wife, say no more," he replied in an agitated voice; "Madeline shall do as she chooses; you have pleaded well for her."

Then he turned to his daughter.

"My dear, forget what I have said. I am not myself; trouble has unmanned me. Heaven knows I value affection, and if Vernon prove himself worthy of you, marry him. I will say nothing against it, if I am in the union myself. Truly my blessing will be all I have left to bestow upon you," he said, with a sad smile.

"And what could be worth more?" she cried, almost joyously; then she added, reflectively, "Father, you said if Cecil proved worthy of me. You speak as though it were possible for him to be untrue to me. If I could not believe in him I should be miserable indeed—to me, he seems past the reach of shame."

"My poor child, I hope he may prove worthy of your great love, but 'men are deceivers ever.' I tell you plainly that I do not think he is behaving well. He is much talked about in Jamaica in conjunction with a certain young lady there, and this ought not to be, when he is engaged to you. I meant to have kept this from you, but it is better perhaps that you should know the truth, Madeline, and then if your lover do prove false to you, you will be in a measure prepared for the blow, my poor girl."

"Who dares to say this?" she cried indignantly, "and, father, how can you speak of it as the truth? It is false, utterly false! I will never believe evil of Cecil. If there be such a thing as honour, he is the soul of it. Do not ask me to credit a slander against him; someone has invented it."

"But, Madeline, you can have no enemies. Why should such a thing be said to wound you? and who would be cowardly enough to speak falsely of an absent man? My dear, I am sorry to have to tell you so, but I have seen the letter in which it is mentioned—in fact, it is at the present moment in my pocket."

For a short space she shrank back, and an expression of pain contracted her eyes.

"Ah! that shakes your faith, Madeline. Believe me, I have no wish to undermine your lover, but I fear he is not worthy of your affection. Here is the epistle; you can read it if you will."

"No, no," she said, putting out her hands to thrust it back, "I will not read a line. I will trust Cecil."

"That is blind faith, my dear."

"All faith is blind, father. If your senses are convinced, there is no room for faith."

"Madeline, you are afraid to hear what is said of Vernon. I think it is better that you should do so, and write to him for an explanation. It will be the straightforward course."

"How can I thank you, father?" she answered readily. "That I will gladly do, and now I can read the slanders with a light heart, for Cecil will have the opportunity to contradict them himself. I will go and write to him at once," and she left the room without another word, taking the letter in her hand.

Mrs. Raymond looked at her husband uneasily.

"George, you do not think there is any truth in it?" she asked.

"My dear, I don't know what to think; young men will be young men, and I fear Vernon has been like the rest of them. I cannot see the object of anyone's writing these falsehoods to Godfrey, and moreover, you heard him say he had had a letter from Vernon himself, who spoke in rapturous terms of some young lady."

"Have you seen his letter, too?"

"No."

"Well, I should fancy Mr. Godfrey is the last person Cecil Vernon would write such a letter to. I should imagine any letter to him would be about business, and business alone."

"I had Godfrey's word for it," returned Mr. Raymond, gravely. "I know no more."

And in answer his wife sighed.

#### CHAPTER IV.

"GOOD HEAVENS!" CRIED HE, "CECIL VERNON IS DEAD!"

THE Christmas dinner was almost a silent one, but it had to be gone through. The good fare was scarcely tasted, and the old butler looked grave and concerned.

The day had proved a wearily long one, broken only by the sad scene in the morning, and a visit from Lady Deering to express good wishes for the season.

Some days afterwards as they sat together in the drawing-room, Mason, the butler, appeared with an agitated countenance, and addressed himself to his master.

"I've been in the family, sir, man and boy, this forty year, and it is my heartest 'ope that I may die and be buried in it, and sir, I trust as Thomas Mason 'as allus been a faithful and a honest servant, and as such may he allus remain. And I've a shown in a many visitors in my time, sir—both in and out, but it 'as never 'appened to me to 'ave to keep out anyone who wanted to come in; and although I ain't wanting in hanimal strength, yet, sir, no one can't tackle two, when taken unawares; and in they are, sir, and it wasn't in my power to prevent it."

"Who are in, Thomas?" asked Mrs. Raymond, "I cannot see visitors to-day."

But the visitors, such as they were, were already in the room, and stood before Mr. Raymond with a knowing air, and a half impudent salute.

"Sorry to give offence to the old party, sir," indicating the butler, "but England expects that every man should do his duty, and we Sheriff's officers ain't exempted from the usual tax; but you needn't take it to heart. There ain't no hurry, none whatever. This looks a mighty comfortable crib, and we'll make ourselves at home. My name is Larkins' sir, and this is Mr. Knobs. Come, mate, don't be bashful, man—take a seat."

And he settled himself comfortably in an easy chair, and placed his feet on another, and coolly took out his pipe.

"Don't object to 'bacca, ladies, I 'ope? Some says we have to thank Sir Walter Raly for weeds, but if my bible's not out of gear, we hears of them agrowing in the time of Adam, when he got turned out of the garden and had to earn his daily bread like the rest of us. P'raps, guv'nor, you'll order the beds to be got ready for us, or the sheets mayn't be properly aired, and being of rayther delicate constitootions, we should prefer feather beds; the best room with a south aspect, if possible, and mate, if you're as dry as I am, you'll join me in a glass of something."

The butler, during this speech, stood as if rooted to the spot, staring at him—seeing which the bailiff looked at him and laughed.

"Now, old fat sides, quick—we ain't particular as to sort, so long as the quality's good," he said, suggestively.

"This is unbearable," said Mr. Raymond, indignantly, springing to his feet. "If you are sent here to take possession, you must do your duty, but not in this indecent manner—and I will not put up with it."

"Steady there, old hoss!" said Larkins, suavely. "It ain't of no use for you to be restive."

Knobbs was a far quieter and less aggressive man, and here tried to make peace.

"There ain't no call for to make things unpleasant, pal. Any snug little box will do for me; I don't feel at 'ome in this ere palace-of-truth sort of a place; it unships my talking tackle. If Larkins is agreeable, and Mr. — (making a polite bow to Mason) will invite us into his pauntry, we may be able to assist him after dinner, to pass the evening pleasant. We has a good many queer yarns as we can spin."

"Yes, Mason, for goodness' sake take them away," cried Mrs. Raymond, excitedly; and with a mocking bow from Larkins, the two men followed the distressed old butler out of the room.

Madeline had sat with a white set face, and her blue eyes fixed with absolute horror upon their tormentors, and when they left the apartment Mr. Raymond saw that she was trembling violently.

"Oh, father, father! has it come to this?" she moaned, and covered her wan face with her hands.

"George," said Mrs. Raymond, "cannot you send these dreadful men out of our house? While we are in it *surely* we might have it to ourselves."

"My dear, he answered, with emotion, "we have nothing now. They have more right now than we have—they are in possession, and the law must take its course. I knew what it would be when the blow came."

"Then let us leave here at once; you can but give up everything," she answered, with quiet desperation.

"My dear, we cannot go out into the world without a roof to cover us," returned her husband. "You must leave it in my hands to do what I think for the best."

As he was speaking Mr. Godfrey was announced, and entered with much apparent concern.

"I have just returned from London," he said, shaking the hand of each sympathetically. "I ran up to try and prevent the Sheriff's officers being put in possession, but unfortunately was too late. Now I have walked over to offer you the use of my house for as long as you feel inclined to stay there. You will be welcome as my visitors."

"That is kind of you," replied Mr. Raymond, warmly. "My poor wife and daughter have been sadly annoyed by these impudent fellows. I should be thankful to have them out of the house."

Mrs. Raymond looked anxiously at her daughter, but Madeline sat with downcast eyes, and appeared to take no interest in the conversation; but a few minutes afterwards she rose and left the room, and went upstairs to her own chamber.

For awhile she stood looking out over the sea, with an uncertain expression upon her face. Then she opened her wardrobe, and took out her hat, and warm fur-trimmed jacket, and having dressed herself, she left the house, and walked rapidly along the coast, at length arriving at Highland Towers, where Lady Deering came forward to meet her in her widow's dress, with an unusually bright look upon her still handsome face.

"Madeline—I have good news—I have just had a letter from Arthur. He had heard of his poor father's death, in Central Africa, where he had gone after large game, which accounts for this long delay. He is very much cut up, poor fellow, but you cannot think the relief it is to me to know that

he is safe and well, and that he is coming home at once. His absence has been a sad trial to me, and I cannot think what gave him such a sudden craze for travelling."

A wave of colour swept over Madeline's pale face.

She knew perfectly why Arthur Deering had left his home and his country; and it all came back to her with a vivid flash of memory.

The summer night when he had asked her to be his wife; with the soft murmur of the tide, and the stars looking on.

She could not forget how tender he had been, how earnestly he had pleaded, and how gently he had taken her refusal; promising ever to be her friend, should she require one, even though he could be nothing more.

"How glad you must be," she answered with a smile, "but I shall not be here to greet him. You have heard of our troubles, I suppose?"

"Your troubles? no, indeed, I have not."

"Papa has lost everything," said Madeline with trembling lips, "and we have sheriff's officers in our dear old home."

"My poor child!" replied Lady Deering affectionately, "what a terrible trial for you!"

"It is indeed, no one knows how great."

"Can I help you? Can I be of any use to you?" she inquired warmly. "You cannot remain in the house with such people; why not come and stay here? I need hardly tell you your parents will be welcome too."

"I hoped you would say that!" replied the girl eagerly, "but as Sir Arthur is expected, I don't like to take you at your word."

"He cannot be here at present, Madeline, and if he *did* arrive, he would be more than pleased to welcome you. You were ever a favourite of his, my dear."

"He was always very kind to me," she faltered. "but I suppose Highland Towers is *his* now, and I should not like him to find an uninvited visitor at his house."

"My dear," returned her ladyship with some show of dignity. "My guests will ever be welcome in my son's home, either at Highland Towers or his other estates; and I hope you will tell your parents that they will be heartily welcome here."

So Madeline went back to Faircliffe Abbey with a lightened heart.

"My dear," said her mother. "I have been quite anxious about you; you did not tell me you were going out."

"I have been to Lady Deering's, mamma; and I have brought you and pa a such a kind message from her; she wants us all to go and stay with her."

Mrs. Raymond cast an anxious glance at her husband.

He looked up suddenly.

"Did you not hear me accept Mr. Godfrey's invitation to the Manor House?" he asked.

"Well, yes, I did; but, father dear, under the circumstances I cannot very well stay under his roof."

"I see nothing of the kind; your mother and I go to Mr. Godfrey's to-morrow, and I shall expect you to accompany us."

"Very well, papa," she answered quietly; "but remember, I cannot entertain his offer."

"Nothing need be said about that at present. It is very important to me to retain Godfrey's friendship, and I must beg you to be polite to him."

"I will attend to your wishes, papa," and she left the room with a quiet step and sat down to write to Lady Deering.

In a few minutes her mother entered her room.

"Mother," she said wearily, "do you approve of our going to the Manor House?"

Mrs. Raymond looked uncomfortable.

"It is your father's wish," she said simply.

"Mother, could not you and I go to Highland Towers, and father stay with Mr. Godfrey?" asked Madeline eagerly.

Mrs. Raymond shook her head.

"I cannot desert your father in his trouble," she said sadly. "If you like to go there, Lina, do so."

"No, mother, if you cannot desert father, I cannot desert you," replied the girl, clinging to her. "I can bear anything for your sake."

So the following day saw them at the Manor House, and Mr. Raymond's spirits rose.

Mr. Godfrey showed them every kindness, and Madeline grew to feel utterly ashamed of her suspicions of him, and yet she could not shake them off.

He never, in any way, referred to the offer which he had made, and which her father had refused as delicately as he could; but seemed an anxious and valuable friend. He and Mr. Raymond undertook together the painful duty of house-hunting, and at length settled to take a small detached cottage, some twelve miles out of London.

Not one article of furniture could be removed from the Abbey, but Mr. Godfrey offered to stand in the gap, and lend a sufficient sum to furnish the cottage respectably; an offer which Mr. Raymond gladly accepted, and ere long they were in possession of their new home, Thomas Mason and Sally, the kitchen-maid, having undertaken to settle them down.

One day as Madeline, mounted upon the steps, was fastening up some lace curtains in the room where her mother was at needle-work and her father writing, the door was opened by the old butler, and Mr. Godfrey was announced.

In a moment the girl felt a chill cross her heart, contented as she had been in her work but a few minutes before.

She came down to greet him, and as she looked into his would-be-sad face she felt that he had come to say something unpleasant, and sat down to bear it as quietly as she could.

"You are settling down, Mrs. Raymond," said the visitor. "Not such a bad little box either, but rather a change after the Abbey."

"A change, indeed! One couldn't swing a cat in these rooms, and we tumble over each other every time we move," struck in Mr. Raymond, irritably.

"Well, you need not remain here any longer than you like," he answered, with a meaning glance at Madeline, who sat quiet and still, as far as the small apartment would admit of.

"You have had a heavy trial," he continued, "and now it is my unpleasant duty to make you acquainted with a new one, so far as Miss Madeline is concerned, at any rate. Raymond, here is a West Indian paper. You had better look at it yourself," and turning the obituary to the top, he pointed out the lines he wished him to pursue.

"Good Heavens!" cried he, as his eyes ran over the intelligence. "Cecil Vernon is dead!"

"Hush! hush! for pity's sake," whispered his wife, but it was too late.

Madeline had heard and fully understood her father's words.

For a long breathing space her eyes were fixed upon him with an expression of horror and agony; the next she had slid without one word to the ground, lifeless and insensible.

## CHAPTER V.

### HARD TIMES.

MADLINE lay for a long time seriously ill, utterly prostrated by the shock she had received, but youth and strength at length prevailed, and by slow degrees she returned to the duties of her every day life, but alas, not to its pleasures.

White and wan, and hollow-eyed, she was a very shadow of the girl who, only a short time since, had been as blithe as the skylark.

The weather was still cold, and the coals in the cellar were low, and the Raymonds had no money to buy more, and Madeline sat shivering before the dying embers.

Thomas Mason entered with the coal scuttle.

"Don't put much on, Thomas, we must make what little we have last," said Mr. Raymond, looking up from his book; "and now, Thomas," he added, "I want to have a few words with you. You and Sally have acted very kindly in coming with us into our exile and seeing to our comfort,



but, as I told you before, it is not in my power to give you even the smallest wages, and you have your own interests to look after. You and Sally must both leave, and we must do the best we can for ourselves."

The old butler stood before his master with a sheepish look, and something very like tears in his faded eyes.

"It ain't of no use your axing it, sir," he said, almost humbly. "I can't go; I won't be no expense to you, sir. The savings of happier days will last as long as I shall need them, and since them *baillies* crossed my path, sir, I don't feel as if I should ever quite 'old up my 'ead again as I did afore. Only let one roof shelter us as it 'as done this many years. Mr. George, you and me was boys together, though maybe, I have the advantage of a few years."

"Not many, Thomas," answered Mr. Raymond, with feeling, "and believe me, sorry as I should be to part with you, it would be far better for you to take another situation than to follow the fallen fortunes of our family."

"No, sir," returned the old man, firmly. "Me and Sally has made up our minds. We don't mean to go! Maybe we can keep you from feeling, the rough edges of this here trouble. As she says to me, sir, 'I'm only a kitchen-maid, Mr. Mason,' says she, 'but I used to 'ave to 'elp everybody at the Abbey, and there's few things as I can't do a little; and you and me can make the poor dears comfortable, *surely*,' and so I 'ope we can, sir."

Mrs. Raymond was much affected by his honest feeling and affection, and looked up at him with a smile.

"You are both very kind, Thomas," she said, "and we will not ask you to go any more. It would be sad, indeed, never to see a familiar face, and it has almost come to that now."

"It has indeed, ma'am, and Mr. Raymond must know best what is right; but none of your old friends wouldn't neglect you, I'm sure, if you would but let them know where you are; but they don't, you see, and so they *can't* come."

"No, no," answered Mr. Raymond quickly. "We could not bear to receive visitors in our altered circumstances, you must give no one our address."

"Very well, sir, but I'm sorry, real sorry;" and with a bow as respectful as ever he had bestowed upon the master of Faircliffe Abbey, he left the room.

"What a faithful creature!" exclaimed Madeline, arousing herself from her sad reverie; "he has set me an example."

"And what is that, my darling?" asked Mrs. Raymond, going to her daughter's side and kneeling before the little fire with her hand clasped in hers.

"He has been working for you, while I have been idling; but it is over now, and I will see what I can do," she answered with a smile.

The following day the sweet white face was bent over a small painting upon which she was occupied, and the thin hands moved quickly, producing rapid effects.

Picture after picture was worked at with industry, until some half dozen were completed.

Then one day Madeline and Sally vanished suddenly, and returned hours after, with sad faces.

Day after day they went out.

Mrs. Raymond knew full well, that her daughter was trying to sell those pretty sketches, and her heart failed her as day by day no good result was attained.

Thomas came in to lay the cloth for dinner. "Has not Miss Madeline returned yet?" inquired her mother anxiously, "it is almost dark."

"No, ma'am, not yet; but Sally is with her, she won't come to no harm, don't fear."

"I am not afraid of that, but she is not fit to be out these cold evenings; how pale and thin she is," and Mrs. Raymond sighed deeply.

"Yes! she's a lily now, instead of a rose, but she's just as beautiful," answered the old servant with genuine chivalry. "Maybe after a time, she'll forget her sorrows, and learn that a good 'usband and 'ome is worth the having."

Mr. Raymond looked up.

"Ah! I wish I could think so. I told you before, how anxious I am that she should marry Mr. Godfrey, and my hope of getting back to the dear old home. He has been very patient and kind, but we cannot expect him to wait always; it is three months now since we left the Abbey."

"Patient he may be, sir," returned the old butler sententially, "and lik-ly enough he would be glad to get Miss Madeline for his wife; but kind! Well, sir, my idea of kindness, 'and some kindness, would have been to have given you the Abbey *first*, without any conditions; and have asked his favour afterwards; but there, different folks have their different ways of doing things."

"You are right, Thomas," answered his mistress, with a smile. "But now, what is this grand display of linen for? have you anything to give us for dinner? I think we cleared the larder out yesterday."

Poor Thomas stood rubbing his forehead reflectively.

"Well, ma'am," he said, "there's nothing that I know of at present, but who can tell? Miss Madeline may have had good luck," he added brightening, "and something may turn up; and a clean cloth allus looks cheerful, and as to the washing, that ain't no consideration, on account of Sally doing it herself, and Miss Madeline having undertaken the ironing. So I feels at liberty to be a little extravagant in linen, if in nothing else," and he carefully folded the dinner napkins into fans, and other devices.

"Here they come, ma'am," he said quite exultantly, as the front door shut, and he hastened to open the one of the sitting-room for them.

"Well darling, what luck?" asked Mrs. Raymond looking up at her daughter. "Have you sold your pictures?"

"Papa was right," answered the girl wearily, "there are thousands who paint better than I do, who can find no purchasers."

"Poor child, I am sorry you have met with disappointment, but you have brought some work, I see."

"Yes! there is work enough to keep you, and Sally and me all hard at it, but the pay will scarcely provide the needles and cotton. It is almost impossible to believe how the poor work-women are ground down, and of course, the shirts are wanted back more quickly than human hands can make them," she added impatiently.

"I would not do them," said Mr. Raymond sharply. "Fancy my daughter becoming a shop shirt maker!"

"Would you not, father? I have learnt the lesson that not only is half a loaf better than none, but that even a slice of bread is better than none at all."

"I will set to work at once, dear, but Sally's hands are full already," said Mrs. Raymond. "We must not set her to stitch too."

"Don't think of me, ma'am," replied the girl heartily. "I'm as strong as a donkey, and, cook used to say, as obstinate as a mule; but there, cooks always is blessed with the worstest of tempers, and always will be; I suppose it's the fires that does it, but if that's the cause of it, amiability will surely be your portion, ma'am, for of all the poor fires, on a cold March day, this is the miserablest I ever saw—and oh! Thomas, how could you go for to let it get so low? you know there ain't a bit of wood to rekindle it with," she added in an aside.

Thomas gesticulated behind his master's back, and then said in a whisper,—

"Nor there ain't no coals neither."

"No coals! and Miss Madeline's simply frozen!" returned the woman, irritably, as she and Thomas left the room together.

"What's to be done?" he asked, with a blank face.

"Done!" she replied, pushing past him. "They shall have a fire, if I have to chop up the kitchen dresser," and ran hastily into the lower regions.

"Heaven only knows how we are to pay the rent," said Mr. Raymond, starting from his chair. "I have tried every office I know of, for a clerkship even, but I am *too old* for them all."

"Don't fret about the rent, father. I heard you say it was due, and I went to the landlord and asked him to wait, but he was very harsh, and wouldn't, so—so I paid him."

"You!" exclaimed both her parents in a breath.

"Yes," answered the girl in utter weariness; "I have paid it."

"But, Madeline, darling you have no money," cried her mother.

"Never mind, mummy, it is all right."

And then her mother saw that her beautiful engagement-ring was no longer on her hand.

"Madeline, my child, you have sold your ring," she exclaimed, in accents of regret, "and I know you valued it so very, very much."

The girl's face worked convulsively.

"Do not talk of it, mother; it is *not sold*, I have only *parted with it* until times are brighter. It is a long lane which has no turning, you know, and the darkest hour is said to come before the dawn. It has been very dark; surely things must be at their worst now," she said, with quivering lips.

"Parted with your ring!" said Mr. Raymond, recovering himself. "Madeline, my dear, surely you have not been to a pawnbroker's. Was there nothing else you could have sold?"

"Nothing. You know we gave all our jewels as a security to Mr. Godfrey, at your wish, and you have not yet had them back."

"No," he answered, reflectively, "not yet."

"Sally went to the shop for me," continued Madeline, "and while she was there I saw some one we know, but I turned away at once, and I do not think he recognized me."

"Who was it?" asked Mr. Raymond, vexedly.

"Sir Arthur Deering, looking so bronzed and well."

"If he did not see you it is all right; but I should be humiliated, indeed, if any of our old friends found us out here."

"And now, mother, I think I have told you all my news, except that I have bought a few slices of cold meat for our dinner."

"Thank you, darling; it is more than I expected, and I am grateful for small mercies. Come, George, Madeline looks quite faint; let us begin our meal at once."

Sally entered the room with a glance of triumph at Madeline, who smiled with surprise at the sight of a scuttle full of coals and wood, and in a few minutes the faithful creature had made a blazing fire, and went away contented.

As she stood alone looking out of the window on her return to the kitchen, she laughed to herself and soliloquized in an undertone.

"It would be *won* than the explosion of the kitchen boiler, if they knew that Sir Arthur Deering had tracked me home; but I ain't so perticular, and as often as he likes to ask me questions, and give me half a sovereign, I'll answer them as straight forward as a bow-priest. Ten shillings is ten shillings in these 'ard times, and neither master nor missus know much about what goes on in the kitchen; they've never been used to it poor dears. How are they to know how long a ton of coals will burn when they have been accustomed to having trucks of them? It ain't likely, and it's all the better for Mr. Mason and me to 'elp them without their knowing, poor dears. Half a sovereign will go some way in coals and wood, and wild 'orses sha'n't make me say where neither one nor the other come from, if they should have chanced to hear they were short, and that they sha'n't do."

The bell rang as she spoke, and Sally ran to answer it.

"Sally," said Madeline, "you and Thomas must be hungry, you had better take the meat out. We have had all we want; get something to eat at once."

"And where's yours, Miss," she asked, looking at her plate, upon which was a piece of bread only.

"Mine!" she repeated, making faces at her to be silent. "Oh! I'm not inclined to eat anything just now."

"No, Miss," replied the woman, doggedly. "No more ain't I, and I don't think Thomas has much appetite neither, but maybe if you would take a

little bit," she added, with feeling, "we might find ours, too."

"Yes, darling," said Mrs. Raymond, lovingly, "Sally is right; you really must try and eat something. You are as white as a ghost, and now you have to work at those wretched shirts you must eat or you will be very ill."

Sally took up a spare fork and placed a slice of meat upon Madeline's plate.

"There, Miss, you'll eat that to please me. I won't touch a bit until you promise."

"Then I promise, you kind Sarah," she answered, with one of her rare smiles. "I cannot refuse you anything," and Sally left the room with a glad look.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A FRIEND IN NEED.

It was a showery April day, and Mr. Raymond had just come in wet through, and had been obliged to change his clothes; having done which, he joined his wife and daughter, who were working hard at some needlework, which was obliged shortly to be sent home to the shop from whence it had been supplied. Suddenly a knock at the door was heard.

"Who can that be?" said Mr. Raymond. "I hope it is not the tax-collector, I'm not ready for him yet."

The door of the sitting room was flung open, and Mr. Godfrey was announced by Mason.

There was a moment's pause. Madeline gave one startled, upward glance, one flush, and then became paler than before, but rose politely to receive their guest.

Mr. Raymond approached him with cordiality. "So you have come to see us at last, old friend. I feared you had given us up," he said, with extended hand.

"By no means," returned he, with his strange look. "I seldom give up people, or things. I have been busy, and I did not know you would miss me; if you have done so, all the better."

Then he warmly greeted Madeline, and her mother, and took the easy chair proffered for his use.

"Well. And how are you getting on here?" he asked.

Mr. Raymond shook his head.

"Things couldn't be much worse. I cannot get any employment, and these poor souls are worked to death at starvation wages. I was just saying when I heard you knock that I hoped you were not the tax-collector!"

And Mr. Raymond tried to smile.

"Ah," returned the visitor, and there was triumph in the tone of his voice.

"You have only to accept my help, you know."

Mr. Raymond looked at Madeline, but her head was drooped over her work.

"The Abbey is to be brought to the hammer in a fortnight, and you know you can return to your old life there, if you please. I have come to-day for a decided answer, whether I am to purchase it or no; as, of course, I must make my arrangements accordingly."

"Of course, of course," replied Mr. Raymond, looking nervous and uncomfortable; and again his eyes rested, full of entreaty, on Madeline; but she did not look up.

"My dear friend, how can I answer you?" he said at length, trying to smile away the awkwardness of the situation. "All may come right in time, in time, you know."

"Yes. Time does wonders," returned the other sarcastically. "We have some author's word for it, that the 'May-pole was married to the scarecrow in time'; but then he adds, 'it was a tedious courtship.' Now, I am not so young as I was, and a long courtship would not suit me at all—I have no mind to waste the best years of my life. I must have an answer at once, Raymond, and know what I am about. You have spoken to Miss Madeline, I presume, and explained to her the advantages I can offer her, if she will only say yes to me."

"You must not be hasty with her, Godfrey. It is but a few months since she lost her lover, and since that she has been very ill; and she is a

girl of sensitive feelings. Give her time, Godfrey, give her time!"

"Oh, certainly; but the matter with reference to the Abbey must be settled to-day. If I purchase it for you, I can wait; but I shall consider that your daughter is pledged to me, in that case."

"Madeline," said Mr. Raymond. "Madeline, my dear, will you agree to that?"

The girl raised her weary, wistful eyes.

"No, father, I cannot agree to it—it is too soon, quite too soon, even to think of such a thing."

"Suppose I wait a year?"

Mr. Raymond caught at the idea.

"A year! yes! That would give Madeline time to get over her trouble, and then she might consent to our wishes."

"Might," echoed Mr. Godfrey, unpleasantly.

"Raymond, I think you had better let me have a talk to your daughter alone, then I shall be able to ask her a few plain questions, and obtain a direct answer."

"If I purchase the Abbey, and agree to wait a year, I shall expect Miss Raymond to become my wife directly afterwards; and you must clearly understand that the sum I advanced to you, after your failure, must be returned to me at once, unless my wishes are complied with."

"What! the hundred pounds you lent me to buy these few sticks of wretched furniture?" cried Mr. Raymond, aghast, "you cannot surely mean—"

"Yes, Raymond, I do mean that. I am willing to help my future father-in-law to the utmost of my ability; but I see no reason for wasting my money upon those who do not appreciate my kindness. So now be good enough to leave me alone with your daughter."

"My dear," said Mr. Raymond to his wife.

"Mr. Godfrey wishes a few words with Madeline, will you come into another room?"

Madeline Raymond rose with a proud air, and raised her face to her father's.

"No, papa," she said, decidedly, "Mr. Godfrey can have nothing to say to me which all the world may not hear; pray, don't leave me."

"Very well, Miss Raymond, as you wish," returned the visitor, indignantly, "but it is scarcely usual, scarcely the thing, to make a man offer his hand before witnesses. However, your parents have long known of my affection for you. I was silent so long as your word was pledged to another; but, now you are free, free to wed me if you will."

She opened her lips to reply to him, but he waved her words aside.

"No, no, hear me out, before you answer me; you are poor, and your parents are dependent upon your exertions for the scantiest fare; you must by now have found out how hard it is for a woman to be a bread-winner. Say you will be my wife, and all the old trouble will be a thing of the past, you and they shall want for nothing. Every fancy, every whim shall be anticipated; you shall restore those you love to the home they so much value. You will be their good angel, and they will bless you, for again ensuring them peace and comfort. Come, Madeline," he added, putting on a lover-like air, "speak but one word, and all will be well. I love you, and would fain make you happy—now, what have you to say to me?"

There was no light in the quiet, almost stern face she lifted to him.

"I have not much to say to you, Mr. Godfrey," she answered, coldly. "My reply to you can be spoken in two letters. No, a thousand times, no. I can never be your wife; I will never be made the price of a bargain. Had you, as my father's friend, shown him kindness, you would have commanded my gratitude—but not my love. But, as it is, I will tell you the truth. Rightly or wrongly, justly or unjustly, I have mistrusted you from the first. Perhaps you worked my father's ruin. I have often thought it. He believed you to be his friend—he highly estimated your powers of judgment, as a man of business; he trusted you and followed your advice implicitly—ruin was the consequence; you may not have helped it, or, I may wrong you in thinking so; but even he can scarcely

be blind to your lack of real friendship any longer, after your words of this afternoon. I will never be bought at a price. Had you been his friend, you would never have allowed him to pine here, in poverty and solitude, while you were surrounded with luxury. If you had loved me, as you say you do, you would never have allowed me to work as I have done, to earn my daily bread. No, no, you wanted us to feel the pinch of poverty, and we have felt it every day for the last four months; but we would rather starve, ay, die, than sell ourselves, even for the tempting bait you offer."

Tears rose to her eyes—her hands were locked together in her deep pain.

"You know the power of the temptation you have set before us. To see the dear lost home again, to go back to the old happy life! Ah! you know how to lure. Life is hard, but what does it matter? When the mind wears out, the body will feel less keenly. It is hard, as you say, for a woman to be a bread-winner, but not so hard, as to be dependent on a man I can never trust or love. Forgive me if I do you a wrong, even in thought, but it comes to me as I lie awake at night, that you sent my lover away in order to be rid of him; with the hope, perhaps, that he might die, and you might take his place. I loved Cecil Vernon. I love him still. He made my happiness. You tell me I should want for nothing as your wife, and I answer, that I should want Cecil every hour of my life, that his image fills my heart. I should shrink from your very touch—I should absolutely hate you. No, no, Mr. Godfrey, I could not marry you even for my parents' sake."

The door behind them had been quietly opened during this conversation, but the four actors in the life drama going on within those walls were each too much taken up with their own thoughts and feelings to notice the fact.

"Very well, Miss Raymond; very well!" answered her would-be suitor, with suppressed anger. "I am not the man to ask you again, and you may live to think it would have been better to have Sam Godfrey for your friend than your enemy."

Then he turned to her father,—

"Remember, Raymond," he said "that my loan must be repaid without loss of time; and I have other matters to settle with you."

Mr. Raymond wrung his hands piteously,—

"Godfrey, I have not a farthing in the world, nor a friend from whom I could borrow a hundred pounds; small as the sum is, there is no one I could ask. I left my friends in my old world when the sun of my prosperity set."

The door, which had been ajar, was now thrust open, and a tall, manly figure entered the room.

"Not all!" said he, in a cheery voice, with a kindly glance from his soft brown eyes at the sad-faced trio before him, whose expression turned to one of astonishment.

"Why, Sir Arthur!" said Mrs. Raymond, with genuine pleasure—"surely you have dropped from the clouds."

"Not so," he returned, clasping her hand; "I found you out a month ago, but heard that Mr. Raymond had declined to receive visitors; but, when I witnessed the admission of one to-day, I thought, as an older friend than Mr. Godfrey, I might be permitted to enter, too. I hope I have judged rightly," and he shook Madeline and her father warmly by the hand. "You must pardon me if for one minute I played eavesdropper, but Mr. Godfrey was in the middle of a sentence, and, having heard his words, I had hardly the sense left to advance, for they were so unexpected that I was spell-bound, until Mr. Raymond answered them."

Then he turned to Madeline's father,—

"You have not left all your friends behind you, indeed, for one is at hand who will never turn into an enemy. I say this before Mr. Godfrey, that he may see his mistake in believing you alone in the world. Mrs. Raymond, I am commissioned by my mother to tell you how greatly both she and I hope you will come at once on a visit to Highland Towers. If I understand rightly, you are at the present moment in need of a cheque for a hundred pounds. It is entirely at the service of so old a friend," and he



seated himself at a side-table, where the ink was standing, and signed and filled one in, and presented it to Mr. Raymond.

Absolute tears rose to the poor old man's eyes, and his voice was broken, as he attempted to express his thanks.

Then he handed the cheque to the very much astonished and crestfallen Mr. Godfrey,—

"Thank Heaven! my debt to you is discharged. You have securities for every other penny I ever had from you. At the same time, Godfrey, I must say that I never expected such treatment at your hands. Sir Arthur has proved himself a true friend."

Mr. Godfrey laughed sarcastically, and quoted quizzically,—

"A friend, Horatio cried, and seemed to start, Yea, marry shalt thou, and with all my heart; And fetch my cloak, for tho' the night be raw, I'll see him too, the first I ever saw!"

"And now, since your debt to me is discharged, as you express it, I'll discharge myself. I wish you joy, Mr. Raymond, and you also, ladies; Sir Arthur, I quite understand your game. 'Yea, marry shalt thou, and with all my heart,' and again he laughed his unpleasant cynical laugh. "For the present I seem to be defeated, but you may find that I am not yet vanquished. Miss Raymond, we shall meet again. The Abbey will pass into the hands of strangers."

"Pardon me," returned Sir Arthur Deering, with a smile. "I have purchased it by private contract."

For one minute the two men stood face to face, the next Mr. Godfrey, the rich merchant, had made his exit, with a look of deadly hatred at the equally wealthy baronet, who, unlike himself, was a perfect gentleman.

Mrs. Raymond stretched her hands to him,— "How can I thank you for all your goodness to us?" she asked, with feeling.

"By carrying out my wish to see you at High-land Towers. I am sure neither you, nor Miss Madeline, nor Mr. Raymond will say no to my request."

Madeline gave him an eloquent look, which fully satisfied him, and Mr. Raymond brokenly expressed his consent also.

(To be continued.)

## LOVE IN A MAZE.

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### CHAPTER IV.

#### A LITTLE ADVENTURE.

"ARE not you ready, Susy?"

"Almost, dear—in a minute."

"The carriage has come round, dear," Aunt Betty said, drumming idly upon the window-pane as she stood dressed for visiting, and looking out over the trees towards Knightsbridge and the Row. "It is nearly four o'clock."

Susy, at the other end of the room, was standing before a mirror on the wall, busily fastening a tea-rose at her neck, just a little on one side and beyond touch of her pretty chin.

Susy had in this month of June discarded wholly her mourning garments; and to-day she had donned a lovely summer frock of some soft ivory-white stuff draped airily with cream-tinted lace and ribbons of old-gold colour.

Miss Dawson herself wore French grey cashmere; bonnet, gloves, parasol, all were of the same exquisite dove-grey shade; and very graceful and distinguished did Aunt Betty look on this memorable afternoon, when their sole and immediate errand was a drive to Hogarth Chambers to call on Douglas Rex.

"There! I am ready now, dear," said Susy, gaily, having at last arranged the beautiful rose and its smooth dark-green shining leaves entirely to her own satisfaction—well-satisfied, too, with the bright girl-picture she had seen in the faithful looking-glass. "So come along."

They ran downstairs together, side by side, the aunt as fleetly as the niece; stepped into the waiting carriage; and were at once borne swiftly and easily away from the neighbourhood of the Park and Park-lane.

"Do not be later than four, or you may not catch him in," Rudolf De Vere had said in the morning, on meeting the Misses Dawson before luncheon under the trees in the Row.

"You have not told him we are coming, I suppose?" had questioned Aunt Betty.

"No," smiled Rudolf. "In that case, I fear your errand of mercy would be undertaken in vain."

Their errand of mercy! Rudolf spoke in a jesting tone; but afterwards all three of them recalled distinctly those lightly-spoken words of his.

"Meaning," said Miss Dawson, "that, if he got a hint of our visit, he would run away from us?"

"Something very like it, perhaps," Rudolf admitted.

Therefore they were anxious to reach Fleet-street before the clock struck four; or, as Aunt Betty said, Mr. Rex would in all likelihood have taken himself off to one of his odious taverns in the neighbourhood.

"If we are late and lose him it will be all my fault, dear," said Susy, contritely, the fragrance of the tea-rose at her throat recalling the lost moments she had trifled away in vanity before the looking-glass at home.

They left the carriage upon the Embankment as the clocks at Westminster chimed before striking the hour; and told their liveried and powdered attendants to drive leisurely up and down by the river until they returned.

Then they crossed the quiet historic gardens of the Temple, where the grass was beautifully green, and the flowers bloomed as sweet and fresh as in a country garden, and the breeze from the river made itself felt deliciously; and soon they gained the precincts of Fleet-street and found the dingy entrance to Boswell-court.

An old woman, in a short print gown, thick laced boots and a flattened black bonnet, was coming out of the arched doorway of Hogarth Chambers. She had a willow-pattern plate in her hand, and was going to fetch some butter for "one of her gentlemen."

Miss Dawson promptly stopped the old woman, and inquired of her whether she could direct them to the abode of Mr. Douglas Rex.

"Why, to be sure, mum; there be Mr. Rex's name on the wall, see, jist behind you there, mum, along o' t' others—fourth floor, first door you comes to, right up a-top. You can't mistake, mum," said the old woman, civilly; "you'll see his name painted up again by the bell-handle."

Rudolf De Vere, in describing the dwelling-place of his friend, had said "very near the sky;" and the Misses Dawson now supposed that "right up a-top" meant the same thing.

The short-skirted old woman in the flattened black bonnet seemed inclined to be talkative; for, before Aunt Betty could thank her for her information, she had begun again.

"Not, however, as I think that you'll find him in, ladies; for one of my gentlemen comes down jist now, and he says to me, he says,—'Mrs. Duckett,' he says, 'is Mr. Rex gone out, do you know? His door's locked; but there ain't no notice, as I can see, a-pinned on there outside, Mrs. Duckett,' he says. 'He rarely do go out till a goodish bit arter four,' I says, 'notice or no notice on the landing-door.' But then I ain't set eyes on him meself, ladies, since yesterday arternoon, I b'lieve 'twas; and then the gentleman from the third floor what knows Mr. Rex, he says to me, 'Well, Mrs. Duckett,' he says, 'perhaps he's only—'"

"Ah, thank you!" Aunt Betty put in, graciously here; "we will run up and ascertain for ourselves. That, I think, will be the better way."

She nodded, smiled, and slipped a half-crown into the hand of Mrs. Duckett, who, to do her justice, was very much "flattered," as she expressed it, at getting anything of the kind; for she neither expected it nor "desired" it, said she.

And she went on her business with the willow-pattern plate, telling herself she was in luck that afternoon.

Wondering whether after all, they were to be

disappointed in her errand, Miss Dawson and her niece began to ascend the cool stone stairway. When they reached the second landing, they halted a little while to draw breath, being in truth unaccustomed to this sort of climbing. It was all very quiet everywhere—everybody indeed seemed out!

"I—I somehow begin to wish now, dear, that—that we hadn't come," whispered Susy, glancing round the bare, unfamiliar place.

"Pooh, dear," answered Miss Dawson, in a light, brave, resolute tone; though, in reality, she, too, now, at the eleventh hour, was beginning to have qualms as to the wisdom and propriety of thus bearding a reluctant bachelor in his den—an unwilling anchorite who had shown them as plainly as possible that he wanted none of their society. "Do not be foolish, Susy. Follow me."

Susy, fearful of she scarcely knew what, caught hold of Aunt Betty's hand; and in this wise they cautiously mounted the other two flights of stone steps.

The higher they went the steeper the stairs seemed to come. But at last they arrived at the top floor of all, where dwelt the hermit friend of Rudolf De Vere.

Through a skylight in the roof of the top landing the sunshine poured in upon them, glorifying the dingy landing-place and lighting up the faded black letters which, painted upon the door-post of the entrance to his chambers, spelled the name of Douglas Rex.

Close to his name, as Mrs. Duckett had explained, hung the bell-handle; which, however, in spite of her show of intrepidity, now that the end of their journey was actually attained, Miss Dawson for some reason or other hesitated to pull.

It would be difficult to say why; but Susy's sudden faint-heartedness had certainly smitten Aunt Betty with a similar lack of courage, though she did her airy best to conceal the loss from Susy.

It would be also difficult to determine why they had climbed to their goal so stealthily—even, now that they were standing outside Douglas's very door, were standing upon the very threshold of his dwelling, speaking in whispers audible only to themselves.

Observing Miss Dawson's singular hesitation, Susy breathed wickedly into her aunt's ear,—

"Infirm of purpose! give me the daggers!"—I mean the bell-handle, and let me pull it, dear."

Miss Dawson tried not to laugh, and whispered back, hastily,—

"No, no; wait a minute. You see, Susy, one never knows for certain what a bell—a strange bell like this—is capable of. It may give out a mere tiny, insignificant tinkle, or it may clang blatanly with noise sufficient to wake the dead. Supposing it to be the latter case with this Bohemian house-bell, and its master be really not at home, some officious unknown man or other from regions below will in all probability come running up here—and how on earth are we to get away?—to tell us what we already suspect: that Mr. Douglas Rex is gone out. I—I should not much like that, I confess."

"But, dear," suggested Susy, slyly, whose adventuresome spirit was gradually reviving, resuscitated perhaps by her sense of fun and her keen appreciation of the riskiness of the situation—"Mr. Rex himself is also at present a perfect stranger to us. Don't forget that."

"I—I know, dear. Of course," replied Miss Dawson, thoughtfully, if a little nervously. Then a brilliant notion entered her mind. "It appears to be a good big one, Susy, and I don't believe the key is in it," said Aunt Betty. "So let us first of all, dear, peep through the key-hole."

Susy Dawson felt that she must very soon scream, or let her laughter find vent; suppressed mixed emotions, so to speak, were overflowing within her. Yet she managed to say softly,—

"But will not that be rather mean of us?"

"Well, he will never know," said Miss Dawson, resolutely. "I shall do it."

So deciding, Aunt Betty forthwith stooped and put her eye to the key-hole of Mr. Rex's door; whilst Susy, standing behind her, watched her in silence with tightly-clasped hands and gay ex-

pectant eyes. But, whatever Susy Dawson expected to ensue as the result of Aunt Betty's saying, she assuredly was not prepared for the very remarkable incident that happened immediately, then and there.

For the next moment, with something akin to a shriek, Miss Dawson had started upright again—had seized the door-handle with both small grey-gloved hands; and in this fashion she shook and wrenched at the bolted door with all the strength her shocked nerves could command.

"Wretched, foolish man! Idiot! coward of a man—open the door!" cried Miss Dawson frantically—"and let us in! Do you hear? Open the door and let us in directly!"

And again she rattled and wrenched at the heavy door-knob until her gloves were split in a dozen places—just as though her puny efforts could so break down the unyielding barrier.

Susy herself was so utterly amazed at this singular performance that she nearly shrieked too. "Gracious—good heavens, dear!" she gasped. "What is the matter?"

But Miss Dawson, as if suddenly bereft of her reason, paid no heed to her wondering niece; and surely never in her life before had Susy Dawson been so astonished.

"Idiot! Fool! Mr. Rex!" again cried the elder Miss Dawson, now beating the outer panels with two little indignantly clenched hands. "Open the door, I say! Open the door!"

#### CHAPTER V.

##### THE FORTUNES AND MISFORTUNES OF DOUGLAS REX.

The door opened; and a man appeared there in the doorway—with haggard face, with wild, dazed eyes, confronting the two Misses Dawson.

It was a difficult moment; all three of them realized that; that is, if the man himself were capable just then of realizing aught but his own misery and shame.

As for Susy Dawson, she was dumbfounded; to have saved her life, she thought, she could have uttered no helping word. Aunt Betty had got them into the predicament, and Aunt Betty's wits must get them out of it.

And so, as Susy could do nothing with her tongue, she made good use of her eyes instead.

She saw before her a tall man, carelessly, not to say slovenly and shabbily dressed, with high square shoulders and a slight stoop. His heavy dark hair was parted in the middle; and, as were his ragged beard and moustache also, was here and there distinctly streaked with grey.

And yet, thought Susy, regarding him almost affrightedly—she not knowing what dreadful thing might happen next—he could not be so old as Rudolf De Vere. And his forehead, she noticed, was deeply lined, as if in his brief lifetime he had either studied or suffered much.

His features were clear-cut, sensitive, but irregular; and those wild, despairing eyes of his beneath their contracted brows seemed to be staring clean through his unwelcome visitors or at some object or other upon the wall behind them.

Then Susy's quick eyes perceived too that his shirt-collar, worn low at the neck and turned down, was unfashioned—that his bearded throat was bare. A painter with a keen eye for the gaunt and pathetic would have put him upon canvas with eager, loving touch, and have christened his labour "Despair."

Douglas himself was the first to speak.

He moved his hand slowly and vaguely over his rough head, and said hoarsely—yet, perhaps, not meaning to be discourteous—

"What in the world do you want?"

A plain, well-put question should receive a straight-forward answer. Miss Dawson, having in a measure recovered her native *savoir-faire*, rather to her own surprise, it may be said, found herself equal to the occasion. For never had she dreamed, on setting out Cityward, that her philanthropy would land her in so dire a quandary.

"We came on purpose to see you, Mr. Rex," Aunt Betty said; and then, eyeing him sternly meanwhile, she added,—

"And thank Heaven, say I, that we did come, and a-come in time! And you, sir, should thank Heaven likewise."

"Rather, with Job of old," groaned Douglas Rex "would I curse Heaven and die!"

"You should be ashamed of yourself, indeed, you should!" exclaimed Miss Betty Dawson, indignantly.

Douglas's ragged beard went downward with a jerk to his breast.

"Perhaps I am," he muttered, sullenly. "All the same—"

"That is better. Since you have the grace to feel some touch of shame, there may yet be some hope for you," Miss Dawson put in, gravely and more kindly. "And now, suppose you invite us in. We have something to say to you, and shall be glad to sit down."

Douglas barred their passage no longer; but standing aside in the sun-flecked entrance, he with a weary, unwilling gesture bade them enter his bachelor lodging.

Needing no second bidding, Miss Dawson marched in and sat down; and bewildered Susy, uncertain what else to do, followed Aunt Betty and seated herself by her side.

Douglas, having shut the outer door, returned to them; and dropped into the leather chair, by his writing-table, in pretty much the same forlorn attitude as that in which Miss Dawson, on peeping through the key-hole, had first descried him.

"You must forgive my saying," Douglas then remarked, without, however, looking at them, "that I am at this moment in total ignorance as to whom I have the pleasure of speaking; equally as to what circumstance I am indebted for the honour of this—"

"Call it intrusion, or invasion; or an unwarrantable impertinence, just whichever or whatever you please," interrupted Miss Dawson glibly, and now with a friendly smile. "We shall not mind—shall we, Susy?"

"No," faltered Susy Dawson, feeling exceedingly abashed and uncomfortable. For as she spoke, though it was merely a scared, gasping little "No," Douglas raised his head and looked at her fully for the first time.

Susy felt that she must writhle under his fixed, unhappy gaze.

It was they, surely, who should feel ashamed and humbled, she was thinking hurriedly, for thus obtruding themselves upon the privacy of this man—in reality an utter stranger to them—and witnessing a sorrow and self-abasement which never were meant for alien eyes.

The weakness and despair of a strong and young man, whose life should be full of energy and hope, ever pushing onward towards success, must be at any time a grievous sight—verily, a grief that should be secret, revered, hidden from the cold and curious eyes of the world!

Susy's warm young heart was full of compassion for Douglas Rex; and she called up sufficient courage to glance at him again.

She found, to her confusion, that he was still staring at her. Her eyes dropped before his; and Susy grew hot all over.

"Well, welcome the Misses Dawson, let me explain to you, Mr. Rex," she heard Aunt Betty saying, in an easy and unembarrassed sort of way—indeed the elder Miss Dawson was quite herself again by this time—"and our present home is in Park-lane. As you would not come to see us there, we resolved to make our way unasked into Hogarth Chambers to call upon you; our chief object being to thank you in person for your capital paragraph or article about us in the *Kettledrum* the other day. It was just the very thing," cried Miss Dawson, enthusiastically, wishing, if it were possible, to get Douglas at his ease—"precisely what we wanted, Mr. Rex, I do assure you."

"I am beginning to understand now," said he, slowly, as if mists and cobwebs were clearing from his brain, "that you must be the ladies from Santa Rosa Island—the friends of my own friend, Rudolf De Vere?"

"Exactly," Miss Dawson replied. "We—my niece, Susy, and I—are the ladies from Santa Rosa; and Mr. Rudolf De Vere is the kindest and best friend we have in London. In fact," laughed

Aunt Betty, with a sudden pretty pink blush, "without Mr. De Vere, we should have been, I fear—to put it in the vulgar tongue—nowhere!"

"Yes; he's the dearest fellow alive; and the most generous; the best and truest of friends," said Douglas, musingly. "No wonder you like him. Miss Dawson," he added, turning to her almost brusquely, "do not—I ask it as a special favour—do not tell De Vere what—what you have seen here this afternoon. I would rather tell him myself—in my own way."

Once more the elder Miss Dawson thought fit to look exceeding stern and condemnatory.

"Very well. I will not. But on one condition only," she said.

"Name it," Douglas muttered, with ragged beard touching his breast again in the old despondent manner.

"That such a foolish and wicked thing shall never, never happen again," said Miss Dawson, in a very solemn manner indeed.

He lifted his head to reply; and then for the second time the unhappy eyes of Douglas Rex fell and dwelt involuntarily upon the figure of Susy Dawson.

But she now was unconscious of his scrutiny—she was glancing timidly around the room, her eyes wandering in a nervous sort of way from one object in it to another, yet always contriving to avoid its principal object and owner, Douglas himself.

For the brief foregoing part of the conversation was in a degree unintelligible to Susy, though awfully suggestive of darkest possibilities.

She knew that it must have reference to what Aunt Betty had seen so timely through the key-hole, and she tried not to guess or to imagine anything further.

Susy saw that the room was a large and an airy one, albeit meagrely furnished and very dusty withal. She was honestly thinking that a hard scrubbing-out would have done it more good than anything—indeed, that was exactly what it wanted!

The windows were flanked by cumbersome old-fashioned folding shutters; but there were no blinds; and they too—the window panes—were gray and dim with dust, so that one could barely look down through them into the quiet, dingy, narrow court beneath.

Several doors opened on the room; one of which was presumably Douglas's bed-room door.

The sofa whereon the two Misses Dawson were sitting—side by side—was an old faded leather one of a chocolate tint, wholly flattened and springless, and very much the worse in every way for age and wear.

Like Douglas's writing-table itself, the ancient sofa had a deplorably untidy appearance, being littered all over with sundry periodicals and newspapers, loose sheets of manuscript-paper, some written upon and others not, books, novels sent in for review, an old soft felt hat and a walking-stick lying beside it.

Miss Dawson and Susy were obliged to perch themselves upon the extreme edge; for likewise every chair in the room, save Douglas's own writing-chair, supported some article or other for the use of which it never was originally intended.

Chaos indeed reigned throughout.

Under the sofa sprawled a pair of boots, kicked off there and forgotten three or more days ago.

Yes—altogether an unlovely bare room; its one redeeming feature a well-filled oak book-case, the volumes of which, however, were far from presenting an orderly spectacle—most of them, indeed were falling about sideways, and leaning for support one against another, like so many inebriates, thought Susy Dawson, idly.

"Oh my word, it shall never happen again," she heard Douglas declaring earnestly to Aunt Betty.

"You are a gentleman, I know, Mr. Rex; and I believe you," replied Miss Dawson, with dignity.

"I have been a great fool," Douglas groaned, flinging his long arms desolately across his desk, and bowing his head above them.



"You have indeed—upon my word you have," Miss Dawson answered, candidly. "But, come now, let us see whether we cannot help you. There are times when a woman's advice is not to be despised, you know."

"You are very good. But, frankly, I do not see that you can help me in any way at all," Douglas said, with just the flicker of a smile lighting up for an instant his tired worn face. "A man, I am beginning to find out, must fight his own battles after all!"

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE FORTUNES AND MISFORTUNES OF DOUGLAS REX (continued).

THE bracing influence of Miss Dawson's presence and manner was unquestionably reaching the despondent soul of Douglas Rex.

The unexpected apparition of the ladies from Santa Rosa Island had at first been nothing short of an intolerable shock; yet Douglas, after all, was now thinking vaguely that their unbidden coming to Hogarth Chambers was something singularly like a really pleasurable experience, and as vaguely did he comprehend that he was in no wise anxious to see them depart just yet.

On the contrary, he felt that, when they should be gone, his large dingy room near the sky would seem all the dimmer and emptier, all the lonelier indeed, for their having been there with him during that one brief hour.

He began to speak of his straits and his troubles in a listless, desultory, and yet entirely unreserved fashion, which Miss Dawson so judiciously and so tactfully encouraged, that Douglas never dreamed at the time how cleverly Aunt Betty was "playing him"—"drawing him out"—as she was heard to express it afterwards.

He spoke quite simply, was not a bit shy now that he felt more at ease with them, and the first great awkwardness of their meeting was smoothed over—a meeting attended, and made memorable by such tragic circumstances—spoke of his struggles, his debts, his disappointments; his fits of gloom and depression; the awful feeling of leaden hopelessness, in particular, which had seized on him and overwhelmed him irresistibly that day.

He was one of life's failures, Douglas said; and, for a man, what, indeed, could be more bitter than that?

It meant so much. The future before him was unutterably dark. He could descry in it ahead no glimmer of any kind.

"It is this cruel pen-labour for bare sustenance, this unceasing daily brain-drudgery in order to keep body and soul together, which wears out a man and grinds the hope out of him. If I had only the leisure—time to think, to dream, to plot and elaborate—that is, if I could only afford to be idle sometimes," said Douglas, wearily, "I should succeed eventually in the struggle. I know I could win, could come off victorious in the end, if—if—if only—"

"Ah, I see what you mean! I understand," Miss Dawson interrupted, gently and thoughtfully. "Yes, yes; of course it is very hard."

"Only this afternoon," Douglas continued, "in fact, shortly before—shortly before you arrived, the post brought me this. Here, read it, Miss Dawson, if you will. It won't take you long," with a transient, bitter smile.

Speaking, he handed to Aunt Betty an open note; then planted his elbows upon the desk before him, and shaded his eyes with his loosely-casped hands.

Miss Dawson took the note, reading it at a glance. "Messrs. Lynx and Lane present their compliments to Mr. Douglas Rex, and regret that they are unable to make him any offer for his novel, *The Pagan Bride*. The MS. has therefore been re-turned by parcels post."

"H'm—short, but sweet; but to the purpose," commented Miss Dawson, recollecting what Rudolf De Vere had said about the recently completed novel of sensation and adventure, concerning which effort Douglas hoped great things. Then she gave the note back to him, saying, a trifle disdainfully,—

"But surely you will not suffer yourself to become wholly discouraged, helplessly disheartened by this one paltry rejection! There are more publishers in London, I believe, than Messrs. Lynx and Lane! You must try someone else—and at once!"

Douglas shook his rough head without looking up, sighing dolefully.

"Come, come, Mr. Rex, be braver than that," cried Aunt Betty, briskly. "Remember the shocking blunders that short-sighted publishers so often make! Think of books, now of world-wide fame—books that are devoured, loved, wept and laughed over even in such distant and out-of-the-way corners of the globe as Santa Rosa—and take heart and try again! How many of those self-same books were in the first instance rejected as worthless! Remember how foolish publishers turned their backs resolutely on *East Lynne* and *Vanity Fair*; to mention no others of almost equal renown; and you and *The Pagan Bride* may be famous yet. Where is the MS.?" demanded Miss Dawson, suddenly. "Perhaps you will allow me to look at it!"

Douglas explained moodily that he had not yet received the unfortunate MS., that probably the parcel was still lying at the publishers' office, and would not be delivered in Hogarth Chambers until the following morning.

"Well, you have just to try again somewhere—that is all," declared Miss Dawson emphatically, "and you must try again, I say, and again, and again if necessary. By the way, why on earth do you not get Mr. De Vere to help you? Surely in such matters as these his aid would be invaluable—indeed, I am told that he has as much influence in art affairs as any man in London. He knows all sorts of the right people—publishers, journalists, newspaper-proprietors, authors, editors, critics, and all the rest of the tribe. Why, Mr. Rex, you know that he does without my telling you! Rudolf De Vere is the very man to help you; your own familiar friend into the bargain; and naturally—"

Douglas here stopped his voluble and vivacious visitor; and something like a groan broke from him once more, as he said,—

"No, no, no! I cannot, I will not worry Rudolf any more with my wretched affairs. He has helped me so often, so much already. Ah, you do not know the extent of his patience and his kindness with me—I could not tell you all! Even for—a more substantial kind of assistance, too, I am indebted to Rudolf; and it seems to me that I never shall be able to pay him back—now! For I had hoped so much from my book; to do so much in many ways . . . if it met with acceptance and good treatment . . . in short, if it proved a success! And now here are defeat and disappointment and ruin once more staring me in the face; and—and I cannot ask further help from Rudolf De Vere; the bare thought is gall and wormwood."

"I think you are right," said Aunt Betty gently.

"How can I go on asking him to help me; how can I, as if I had a right to do it, be always expecting him to use his influence on my behalf; how can I be for ever taking advantage of his good nature and sweet temper, when I am already bowed so low with an intolerably heavy burthen of obligations?" questioned Douglas passionately. "Of course," he continued more calmly, "I know perfectly well that he would never dream of reminding me of—of anything; I know, dear fellow! on the contrary, that he would give me his last shilling before he would do that. But, oh! Miss Dawson, just think of the position for a man—the pitifulness—the humiliation of it! Only think!—"

Douglas Rex checked himself, and hid his face in his hands.

"I see what it is," answered Aunt Betty, after a pause. "What you want, my poor boy"—this with an assumption of motherly concern so admirable and yet so droll, that, sobered and saddened, as she really was just then, an irrepressible gleam of amusement flitted nevertheless over the features of Susy—"what you want, my poor boy, is cheering-up; and a doctor, I dare say, if you went to him, would tell you that it is nothing in the world but 'liver.' However, be

that as it may, you must come to us—we will hear of no denial this time. Do you hear and understand what I am saying, Mr. Rex? You must come to see us. Mr. De Vere knows where we live, and he will bring you. It does not do to shut one-self up altogether from society—particularly from the society of women—and mope, and brood, and stare always at the dark side of things. It is absolutely wrong and sinful, and never was meant to be right. Everybody wants rousing—change—at different times; though it is not everybody, mind you, that can get it when he wants it. But in your case, Mr. Rex, there is no excuse; none in the world. So promise me," said Miss Dawson, rising suddenly—and Susy, in a frightened, uncertain sort of way, jumped up too—"promise me now before we go, that you will come and see us some evening in Park-lane!"

"Yes, I promise," said Douglas humbly.

"Soon, I mean. This week," insisted Aunt Betty.

"Yes—I will try," promised Douglas.

Miss Dawson, as she stood there, before taking her departure, seemed to be peering about the room for something in it she could not see. Douglas watched her nervously—divining, it may be, the object of her quest.

"Come now, where is it?" said Miss Dawson peremptorily. "You are as bad as a child with a dangerous plaything, Mr. Rex, and must be looked after by your elders accordingly."

Without a word of protest or remonstrance he turned then to his table; swept aside some papers partly lodged there upon his writing-board; and so bared to their view a small shining revolver, fully cocked.

At sight of the murderous-looking thing, a little painful cry escaped the lips of Susy Dawson. Her piquant sweet, bright face paled with sudden horror.

"Oh! I—I scarcely thought. I dared not think that it was so bad as that!" exclaimed she very low.

Douglas Rex winced perceptibly; folded his arms, looked unutterably wretched, but remained silent. In that minute his hatred of his own terrible cowardice was more real and intense perhaps than it had been throughout the interview. The horror in Susy's voice seemed to enter and thrill the very soul of the man.

"I am going to take that frightful thing away from you," said Miss Dawson, sternly. "You have given me your word, I know; and I do not doubt you; still, it will be best. Come, Mr. Rex, let me have it—Stay, though! It looks worse than dangerous as it is; and before I put a finger on it I would rather that you made it as harmless as possible. Like all women, I have an unconquerable dread of firearms, and an equally unconquerable idea that they are able at any moment to go off by themselves."

Obediently did the young man do all that was required of him. He drew out the charge from each separate chamber, and he let down the trigger safely into its place—click!

Then he wrapped the pistol mechanically in a piece of brown paper, tied it round with string, and handed the parcel meekly to Miss Dawson.

She took it from him gingerly; held it as if it might bite her; and moved slowly towards the door.

"Remember!" said she. "You are coming to see us; and I shall forget nothing that I have said—because we are friends now in spite of everything—are we not? And so for a little while, good-bye!"

"Yes—friends, in spite of everything, I hope. How strangely good you are to me!" he murmured brokenly in reply.

For a second or two Susy lingered on the threshold. She looked very frightened indeed, now. However, before following in the wake of Aunt Betty, she went swiftly to Douglas's side, and said in a hurried, headlong haste,—

"Oh, Mr. Rex! do be brave; braver than you have been, I mean. There is One who knows all our troubles—there is, indeed—and who will help us in them if—if we seek that aid honestly, when things look darkest and life seems heaviest. Don't lose heart—don't lose all faith and all



"WHAT IN THE WORLD DO YOU WANT?" SAID DOUGLAS REX, HOARSELY.

hope together; but bear up and struggle on like—like a man. And oh! believe me, with a little trust and patience and courage, everything will come right in the end," gasped Susy, more and more alarmed at her own tremendous audacity.

"Heaven bless you!" Douglas managed to say, seizing her hand, impulsively. No other word could he utter. And the next moment the door had closed on them and they were gone from his sight.

Then Douglas spread his arms against the wall, pressed his head upon them, and sobbed like a child.

"We were not a second too soon," remarked Miss Dawson, gravely, as they found their way back to the carriage which was awaiting them within sight of Cleopatra's Needle.

"And we might have been a second too late, dear," said Susy, in a trembling undertone. "It is awful indeed, to think of!"

"Truly awful, darling," agreed the elder Miss Dawson. "What fools some men are, to be sure!"

With which bit of trite philosophy, she stepped quickly to the broad Embankment wall, and there, unobserved by anyone near save Susy, she dropped the brown-paper parcel—splash!—into the river.

Only one more secret, one more tragic life-story, lost for ever in its dark and muddy heart—the dark and muddy heart that to-day lay hidden beneath a breezy and sunlit smile.

Oh, cruel London river!—full of sorrowful secrets as the wide, sad sea itself!

Soon the Misses Dawson, reseated in their carriage were driving rapidly in an easterly direction, Ludgate Hill way.

"We shall have the time, after all," Miss Dawson had said, glancing at her watch, after a brief consultation with Susy. "A publishing place wouldn't close until six o'clock, I fancy; and it is not yet half-past five."

"Let us try, at any rate," said Susy, eagerly. And so the elder Miss Dawson had said hurriedly to her attendants,—

"Drive, now, please, to Messrs. Lynx and Lane, Featherdown-buildings, Paternoster-square. And then home."

They had one or two engagements for that same evening; and it was past seven o'clock when they got back to Park-lane.

Tea was then ready for them in the drawing-room, and Miss Dawson and her niece stood sipping it and enjoying it after the dust and glare of the crowded streets, dressed as they had been for their drive in the afternoon, before going to their rooms for a bath and their dinner-gowns.

"Take off that frizzy hot thing and kick it about the room, dear—just to amuse me! Do, darling," suggested Susy, light-heartedly, whose spirits had risen in a marvellous manner, indeed, to their natural pitch, within the past two hours. "You will make me laugh until I cry; you always do; and it does me more good than anything."

But Aunt Betty, on her part, seemed unusually serious, and she answered, absently,—

"No. Truly I feel in no humour for fun just now, Susy dear. The events of the afternoon have sobered me for a while, and I am rather tired into the bargain. I cannot forget just yet, what we have seen and gone through in that dull room 'near the sky.' Besides," fingering thoughtfully the pretty gray lovelocks which strayed so coquettishly over her smooth, low brow, "I have on my best, to-day—my Vienna one—and I do not want the bother of getting another—I mean, you know—that is, I should like it to last until—well, until—"

Miss Dawson hesitated, appeared lost in reflection, and Susy put in,—

"Yes, dear?" in a soft, inquisitive tone.

"Oh, never mind," then said Aunt Betty, dreamily.

"Ah, but I know!" cried Susy, with a flash of insufferable sly wisdom. "You want the becoming Vienna one to last, dear, until somebody has had the wit to discover—"

Then Elizabeth Dawson became alert in an

instant, and clapped her small, cool white hand over Susy's audacious mouth.

"You do not know," exclaimed she, flushing her lovely rare pink. "How dare you pretend that you do? Susy, you are an incorrigible, precocious little wretch, and deserve to be sent back to Santa Rosa—packed off this very minute—"

"Mr. Rudolf De Vere," announced a footman, opening wide the door.

Rudolf, looking delightfully cool and handsome in evening-dress, had strolled in to ask for a cup of tea, and to hear how his friends had sped on their errand to Douglas Rex.

He had dined early at the club, he said, and was now on his way down to an open air, private theatrical affair at Twickenham.

"Have you prevailed? Will he come?" Rudolf inquired.

"Yes, he is coming to us, Mr. De Vere; he has promised, and we are so glad," Susy answered, quickly.

But Miss Dawson herself, recollecting her given word to Douglas, said not a word of the brown-paper parcel which she had dropped over the parapet into the silent river.

A day or so later on, Rudolf De Vere called again in Park-lane; and this time he brought with him Douglas Rex.

"Yours was, in truth, an errand of mercy," Rudolf whispered significantly, in the ear of Miss Dawson. "He should worship you, and be grateful to you, to the end of his life. He has told me everything."

(To be continued.)

SLAVES were openly bought and sold in England up to the year 1772. The *Stamford Mercury* of Nov. 30, 1771, records that "at the late sale of a gentleman's effects at Richmond, a negro boy was put up and sold for £32." This is perhaps the last sale of the kind in this country. In 1772 a judgment of the Court of Queen's Bench decided that slavery could not exist in England.





"YOU ARE QUITE SURE HE IS YOUR COUSIN?" ASKED DOUGLAS, ANXIOUSLY.

## A PAYING GUEST.

### [A NOVELETTE.]

#### CHAPTER I.

THE Dales lived in a small house in a very ordinary street in a London suburb. They were far from rich, but their poverty was quiet, respectable poverty, which meant turned dresses and mended gloves, not executions for rent and county-court summonses. There was always a considerable difficulty in making the two ends of income and expenses meet; but, somehow, by dint of a gigantic tug, it was generally accomplished at last; and though the little family went without a great many things they would have liked, on the whole they were as happy and cheerful as any of their neighbours in Florence-road.

Florence-road itself was new, almost painfully new. It was one of the many side-streets which begin somewhere near Herne Hill Station, and stretch up towards Brixton.

It was an eminently cheap locality, a penny purchasing a penny's full value at any of the adjacent shops, and Spenser Villas—the poetical name of Mrs. Dale's house and the two on either side of it—with "seven rooms, bath-room, and every convenience," as the landlord put it, costing only a rental of twenty pounds a year.

Mrs. Dale's late husband had been in the Customs; the precise department honoured by his services matters not, but it had enabled him, as a young man, to insure his life for three thousand pounds, and on the interest of this his widow and her two girls got along somehow.

"The girls are sure to marry," poor Dale had said to his wife just before he died. "Besides, there's Peter; he is well-to-do, and having only one child, will be able to do something for his nieces."

This was many years ago. Mrs. Dale removed

to Spenser Villas on her husband's death, with rigid economy educated her daughters, and now began to think, poor lady, it was about time one or other of their father's prophecies were fulfilled; but, as yet, there was no sign of a husband for either Evelyn or Maria, while their Uncle Peter only showed he remembered their existence by sending a yearly present (as near Christmas as the sailing of the steamers permitted), consisting chiefly of ostrich feathers.

"It's very good of him," Evelyn remarked one day to her mother, "but, really, we have enough feathers now to last our lives, and a little variety would be pleasant; besides, I like a fitness in things, and it's a little odd for us to go about with feathers good enough for Court, and threadbare jackets, which don't half keep out the cold."

Mrs. Dale sighed. Her capital, invested at four per cent., brought in a hundred and twenty pounds a year. Had it been under her own control she would certainly have gone in for higher interest, in spite of the risk attending it; but Mr. Dale had only given her a life-right in the three thousand pounds, and had appointed two trustees—shrewd, business men, who were not likely to be moved by the widow's entreaties to invest her daughters' ultimate inheritance in anything not perfectly secure.

She was a fond mother, though Evelyn was far away her favourite child. Her will was good to give the girls every advantage, but her means were limited.

"Your uncle writes very kindly," she said thoughtfully. "I don't suppose he has any idea how poor we are."

"And we can't tell him, or he would think we were beggars; so, I suppose, we must go on with our heads covered with expensive plumage, and our shoulders going very much to the wall."

"Did you ever see Uncle Peter, mother?" asked Maria thoughtfully.

"Never," answered her mother. "He went abroad long before I met your father. He was a rolling stone, and for a good many years he did

not get on at all. Then he bought a claim—I think they call it—found diamonds, and grew very rich. He used to write to your father every now and then, but when men haven't seen each other for years, they can't find much to say."

"And he has only one son?"

"Only one, and he was born after they'd been married years and years. Your Uncle Peter called him Benjamin, because, he said, he was the son of his old age; but that was ridiculous, for he wasn't forty."

"And how old is Cousin Ben now?" demanded Evelyn, who took a decided interest in the opposite sex.

"Six-and-twenty," responded Mrs. Dale promptly. "He'll have heaps of money when his father dies. It seems a little hard that you girls, who want it so much more, should be so poor."

She left the room as she spoke, and the sisters drew their chairs a trifle nearer to the fire, for it was a cold, blustering March day.

They heard the street-door close after their mother, and settled themselves for a cosy chat, knowing perfectly that her shopping would take her more than an hour.

They were not in the least alike, and yet, both were nice-looking.

Maria, the elder, was twenty-two. She resented her name as a real grievance, and insisted on being called May, though every one took much pains to convince her "May" was not the correct abbreviation of Maria, and that May Dale was a most difficult combination.

May was a quiet, thoughtful-looking girl with a trim, natty figure, a clear complexion, glossy brown hair and large dark eyes.

Evelyn, three years younger, was fair, with the pink and white prettiness of a wax doll, or Dresden china shepherdess—a dear little thing, but one who always managed to take a little more than her share of the good things which came to Spenser Villa, and who was terribly spoilt by her mother and May.

"Do you know," she said, suddenly to her sister, "I've a great mind to write to Uncle Peter."

"We do write," replied May, "every year, and an awful task it is to get down to the bottom of the second page."

"Ah, but I meant to write him a *real* letter and tell him how things are."

"That would be begging."

"No it wouldn't. If our uncle lived in England he might ask us to spend a week with him every year; being so far away, Uncle Peter would have to do all his hospitality in a lump. Reckoning a week for all the years he's missed, he might very well ask us to spend three or four months with him."

May shook her head.

"We couldn't afford the journey if he did. Don't you see, Evy, we can only just get on keeping quietly here. There's no margin over for even a railway trip, much less a passage to South Africa."

"I hate Herne Hill!" said Evy, rather crossly. "We never go anywhere like other people, May, and we never have a shilling to spend on pretty things."

"It isn't mother's fault; she would give us money if she had it. I think, Evy, we ought to try and earn some."

Down went the corners of Evy's lips.

"No one would give us twenty pounds a year as a governess, and I'm quite sure we should wear out half that in clothes and boots going out in all weathers; besides, the market is overstocked, and—I do hate the thought of it."

"There are other things," suggested May, practically. "I am quite sure, Evy, if we want money we must earn it."

"I don't know type-writing," said the spoilt youngest, "and I'm quite sure I should never make sixpence by fancy work. As to plain sewing, I'm not going to work my fingers into holes for anyone."

"I suppose," said May, slowly, "we could not take a paying guest?"

"A what? Oh! you mean a boarder. Why, May, they are desperately hard to get. Whole columns of advertisements tell of charming homes awaiting their patronage, and I don't think, with a little deprecating glance, 'No. 2 Spenser Villas is charming.'"

"It's comfortable," said May, "and we should have one advantage, Evy: so many people want to live out of their boarders, and have nothing else to depend on. Now, we can pay our way without."

"And should only want the boarder for luxuries," said Evy, thoughtfully. "I see that; also mother understands good cooking and makes Jane give it up. There are no small children, sewing machines or clothes lines. Young men object to all these drawbacks, I believe. I'm not sure, May, but what your suggestion's worth something after all."

They made a few little festive preparations for tea, perhaps with the view of putting their mother into a cheerful frame of mind. Evelyn set out the round table to its best advantage.

May burnt her face in making a splendid pile of hot dripping toast, which diffused a tempting odour when Mrs. Dale at length appeared.

"It's really dreadful, girls, how dear things are," she said, gloomily, which was a distinct libel on the shops in the vicinity of Florence-road, which are and long have been noted for their cheapness.

"May and I have hit on a lovely plan of earning money," said Evy, coaxingly. "You know we have set our hearts on season tickets for the Crystal Palace this summer, and we both want a regular new rig out. Last year's dresses will look awful, the fashions have changed so, and we want some money *dreadfully*."

So did Mrs. Dale, but she only looked anxiously at her girls' flushed faces.

"I won't have you leave me," she said, decidedly. "People say girls get on very well as lady helps, but while I have a roof over my head I prefer to keep both of you at home."

"And we mean to stay, mother dear, only—"

and with a sudden plunge Evelyn introduced May's idea, rather taking the credit of it herself,

which the elder sister forgave, well knowing her mother would look more favourably on the idea if she thought it Evy's.

"But what would your uncle say?" exclaimed Mrs. Dale. "He might think I was letting myself down."

"He need never hear anything about it," returned Evelyn, coaxingly. "Besides, heaps of people take boarders nowadays. There's nothing at all *infra dig* in it."

"And you see," put in May, gravely, "we're not bound to go on with it. We might try it just for a few months. Suppose we asked twenty-five shillings a week, ten shillings would be clear profit. Evy and I only want just a few pounds each, so if we kept our paying guest till August, we should manage beautifully."

"It would be rather nice to have a young man about the house," admitted the mother, "if he was thoroughly respectable, and didn't give himself airs."

"He could have the spare bedroom, and the lobby-room to smoke in. All young men smoke," said May, practically, for No. 2, Spenser Villas, besides the two "reception rooms," boasted a third sitting-room at the end of the narrow "hall," which led straight into the garden. Under the present régime this alip was used chiefly to keep garden tools, tender plants, and such things carefully under cover. But there was no doubt a little trouble would convert it into a very comfortable little den for the "paying guest."

"I don't know what your poor father would say," was Mrs. Dale's ultimatum; "but I don't mind your trying it, girls, for a few months, on one condition: if our first boarder turns out a failure, you must give up all idea of another. And," very nervously, "I can't bear to think of putting a card in the win low."

"Of course not, mother," said Evy, soothingly; "we'll advertise in the *Herne Hill Times*. That will be the best plan."

The advertisement was delayed for nearly a month. First the "lobby-room" needed repapering, and the landlord, who appreciated the Dales as quiet, respectable tenants, was prevailed on to do it, though taking his own time, as landlords are wont to do. Then came a change of servants, and finally Mrs. Dale caught a very bad cold. So it was almost the end of April before the two girls could glaze over three lines in the *Herne Hill Times*, which really seemed to them more interesting than all the rest of the paper.

Board and residence, with home comforts, are offered to a gentleman in the house of a widow lady. Apply to Mrs. Dale, 2, Spenser Villas, Florence-road, Herne Hill."

"It is so nice that the paper comes out on a Friday," said May, cheerfully, "for I suppose men have to do all their home-hunting on Saturdays."

Mrs. Dale was far more nervous than her daughters, and regarded the coming boarder with great timidity. But when the afternoon passed, and not a single gentleman had "applied," she began to look nearly as disappointed as the girls. And when about seven she and Evelyn went out to do the modest marketing, delayed till that hour by the waiting, which had been in vain, they had quite made up their minds the eighteen-pence paid for the advertisement had been wasted.

## CHAPTER II.

THERE is an old saying which informs us one half of the world has no idea how the other half lives, and this is peculiarly applicable to the dwellers in London suburbs.

While the Dales were anxiously seeking a paying guest, in the very next street to Florence-road lodged a young man who was so utterly uncomfortable at his present quarters that nothing but a rooted antipathy to change and a great aversion to "giving notices" had prevented his removing weeks before.

Douglas Carew was not used to suburban lodgings. He was the only son of a country clergyman; and when he came to London (where a friend of his father's had procured him a good

opening in a bank), he lived with an uncle and aunt, who had a very pleasant house at Streatham. When his uncle died, Douglas and his aunt still combined their forces, and the arrangement was so pleasant to both, it might have gone on indefinitely, only, when Douglas was twenty-six, Mrs. Melville's married daughter returned to England a widow, with very narrow means, and six small children.

To make a home for "poor Kate" was the old lady's one desire. Her means would go farther in the country, she thought. So the house at Streatham was given up, and the two widows removed to a rural village, first installing Douglas in two airy rooms in Netherton-road, about five minutes' walk from Herne Hill station. And then the young man's troubles began.

Spoilt at home by a mother and adoring sisters, spoilt later on by an admiring aunt, poor Carew had not the faintest idea of the discomforts to which lonely bachelors are prone. His eatables disappeared with terrible rapidity; the girl who waited on him was always dirty; his meals were never punctual, and the cooking was bad, he never dined at home except on Sundays; but his expenses were about double what they had been when he lived with his aunt, and every scrap of comfort had disappeared.

Douglas would have given notice but for the facts mentioned already, and that his landlady had such a "tongue" he positively dreaded an altercation with her. He tried to persuade his mother to let one of his sisters come up and live with him, but like a wise woman she refused.

"You'll be marrying one of these days, Douglas, and then she'd have to come home again, and perhaps wouldn't settle down happily after a few years of London life. No, no, my boy, you'd far better leave Netherton-street and take fresh lodgings."

This was at Easter. When Douglas returned things seemed a trifle better, but on this particular Saturday afternoon when he came home at five with a bad headache, and was kept waiting an hour for his tea, which, when it appeared was almost colourless, his long sufferance was at an end, he lost his temper, rang for Mrs. Dabbs, gave her a week's notice, and then flung himself out of the house, with the consciousness that he had "been and gone and done it," and that he must move by the next Saturday.

Mrs. Dabbs' lodgings had been selected by Douglas Carew's aunt, who saw the card in the window, and was taken by the size of the rooms, which were unusually large for suburban apartments. Douglas was far less enterprising than Mrs. Melville; his first step was to seek advice, and so looking in at the newsagent's where he bought his papers, he asked the good old soul who kept the shop if she could recommend him to any rooms.

"You'd best look in the paper, sir," she said; "there's a many better class people who won't put a card in their window, but like to turn an honest penny."

Douglas bought the paper which the obliging woman opened for him at the right column. It was a strange coincidence that the first advertisement his eyes stopped at should be the one on which Evelyn and her sister had bestowed so much care.

"Spenser Villas, Florence-road," he read aloud, "that must be near here."

"It's the very next turning to where you're living now, sir," said the newspaper seller, who was an old acquaintance of Douglas Carew's, and wanting to keep his custom was perhaps anxious he should settle near, "and Mrs. Dale's a pleasant spoken woman as I'd wish to meet with. She's lived in that house seven years, and a more respectable family you couldn't get into."

"I may as well try it," reflected the young man as he turned in the direction of Florence-road.

"If she's lived there seven years, she must be well known, and I'm sure after what I've suffered at Mrs. Dabbs' to get into a house where people are moderately honest will be a comfort. I wish I'd asked if there were any children but it will be easy to find out."

But when Mr. Carew stopped in front of No. 2, Spenser Villas, he began to think he



had made a mistake. There was a trim look about the house, a big fern in an art pot stood on a table in the bow window, and it was quite light enough for him to see that the front parlour far more resembled his aunt's drawing-room than Mrs. Dabbs' ground-floor; however, he walked up the steps, and knocked at the door.

"Can I see Mrs. Dale?" he asked the neat-looking servant, whose white cap and apron were a positive relief to him after his experiences at Mrs. Dabbs'.

"Mistress is out, sir," said Sarah, civilly, "but Miss Dale's in, if she'll do," and she promptly led the way to the little dining-room where May sat at needlework, her regrets running rather on the eightpence paid for the fruitless advertisement.

Douglas Carew saw a very pretty girl in a neat black dress and fancy apron—a girl who received him with a quiet, business-like composure, which did a good deal to put him at his ease. It was a very pretty room, or he thought it so, his masculine eye not noticing that the carpet showed signs of wear, and that the furniture, though clean and cared for, was not of modern date. The French window opened on to a nice little white balcony which gave a rural air to the place.

"I'm afraid there's some mistake," said Carew, as he sat down. "I came about an advertisement."

"I am so sorry my mother is out; but she won't be very long." May felt a great deal more nervous than he guessed. "You see the house is larger than we require, and mother's income is small, so we thought if we could get someone to live with us it would be nice."

"I used to live with my aunt till she moved into the country," volunteered Douglas. "Since that I've been in lodgings in Netherton-street, and I assure you, Miss Dale, I've been so uncomfortable I only wonder I stood it so long. I wanted to have one of my sisters up to see to me, but my mother thought it wouldn't answer."

"It would have been dull for your sister, if you are out all day."

"I'm out from half-past eight till between five and six. I'm in a London bank. I can give your mother plenty of references, if she thinks we could arrange matters."

May smiled.

"To tell you the truth," she said, frankly, "we never had a boarder before, but now my sister and I are grown up I suppose we cost more, for we seem to find our means smaller. Mother doesn't like the idea of our leaving home, and so we thought we would try and do this."

"My name's Douglas Carew," said the possible "paying guest." "I am tired to death of lodgings, and I should like to get into a private family."

"There's only mother besides us two girls," explained May. "We don't live luxuriously, you know, but comfortably. We have breakfast at eight and we are so near the station I expect that would be early enough even for you. We thought whoever came would like to have tea alone when he got home, and join us at supper later. Mother was going to ask twenty-five shillings per week."

"That's what I paid my aunt, but my weekly bills have been awful since I left her," said Douglas, frankly.

"Will you come and see the room?" suggested May; "there's a tiny little den at the end of the passage we meant to give our boarder to smoke in or to sit in if he wanted to be alone; the bedroom is a good size."

Douglas was more than contented with it, while the lobby-room particularly attracted him. By the time they had returned to the fire Evelyn and her mother came in.

Mr. Carew took a great fancy to Mrs. Dale, she looked so quiet and motherly; the reference he offered happened to be her own doctor, so affairs were soon settled, and when Douglas departed it was understood he would return with his luggage on the following Saturday.

"He's a very gentlemanly young man," pronounced Mrs. Dale, "but I don't think he looks strong."

"From his own account, mother, he seems to have been half starved. His father is a country

clergyman; he has a mother and five sisters, so he will be used to womenkind."

Evelyn had gone up to take off her things, but Mrs. Dale closed the door carefully before she said to May in a whisper,—

"I hope Mr. Carew won't fall in love with Evy; she is so pretty, and of course they will be thrown a great deal together."

"He is too grave for Evy to fancy him," said the elder sister, gently.

"Evelyn must marry a rich man," replied Mrs. Dale gravely; "she is so pretty and graceful she would do credit to any position, and I don't want her young life shadowed by money troubles; I have had to struggle very hard myself, and I want Evy to have an easier life."

A more jealous nature than the elder sister's might have resented that their mother showed no anxiety about her first-born, but Maria was used to Mrs. Dale's favouritism, and gave no sign of annoyance.

"I fancy Evelyn agrees with you entirely, mother. I told her to-day she had better wait for Cousin Ben, and she said I was quite right, for her great ambition was to be rich."

Mr. Douglas Carew came to Florence-road on the appointed day, and before a week had passed he and the Dales mutually congratulated themselves on the result of the advertisement. Douglas felt as if he had regained the home he had thought lost for ever. Mrs. Dale took a fancy to the tall, pleasant-spoken young man, while to the girls it was a totally new experience to have an escort at hand willing to attend them to church or for an evening walk!

A masculine arm was most useful in the little garden, and when it was discovered Mr. Carew was musical and sang duets, Evelyn's delight knew no bounds.

"He really is an acquisition," she told her sister. "I shall always say it was quite an inspiration, May, which made you suggest our taking a paying guest."

Mr. Carew had friends of his own, and often spent an evening or a Sunday with them, but he did not invite anyone to visit him in Florence-road. He felt in a way responsible for anyone he introduced to the simple widow and her pretty daughters. He liked the girls extremely, but he never paid them an idle compliment or ventured even on the border-land of flirtation with either of them, and Mrs. Dale's fears that he might fall in love with Evelyn were lulled to rest, and when in July Mr. Carew took his fortnight's holiday he felt he left three real friends behind him in the little house in Florence-road.

He had been there three months, and the girls had reaped all the benefits they expected from the addition to their mother's income; Mrs. Dale paid them ten shillings a week which they divided impartially, and now possessed besides the longed for season tickets for the Crystal Palace, charming summer dresses of cool blue linen, shady white hats (adorned, of course, with some of Uncle Pete's feathers), and pretty capes of soft fancy cloth.

Mrs. Dale felt quite proud of her girls, and wondered more than ever why no one had offered them that slender golden fetter young ladies often assume so rashly.

"Well," said Evelyn after tea, "I wouldn't have believed we should miss Mr. Carew so much; the house seems quite deserted."

"He is a very nice young man," said her mother; "but, Evy, dear, he is only a bank clerk. I shouldn't like you to think too much about him!"

It was impossible not to see the widow's meaning. Evelyn laughed in the most heart-whole manner.

"Mother, dear, you're much more romantic than your daughters. If Mr. Carew lived here twenty years we should never be anything but friends. I do like him very much, but I am quite sure he would never dream of asking me to marry him, and as he is not at all my ideal, I'm very glad!"

"What is your ideal, child?" asked Mrs. Dale, much relieved.

"Oh, if ever I marry, the man must be very rich and not in business. I could not bear my husband to have to go to work like clockwork as Mr. Carew does; then he is a great deal too

big. I should like to marry a man who wasn't quite a giant, someone with dark hair and blue eyes!"

"You hardly ever see that," objected May; "blue eyes and dark hair are rare enough in women, I never saw a man who had both."

"Which proves how hard I am to please," retorted Evelyn; "then he must have travelled a great deal, and not be a quietly stay-at-home creature, like Mr. Carew!"

A thundering knock at the door stopped the conversation, for the three ladies had so few visitors that such a summons at six o'clock was quite an event.

Sarah was as curious as her employers, and soon came to the drawing-room with a face of amazement.

"It's Mr. Dale, ma'am. He says he's come from Africa to see his aunt."

Another moment and the unknown relative was in the room. May felt a strange sense of bewilderment. Was she dreaming—or what. Surely this was the ideal Evelyn had described so minutely just before!

Benjamin Dale was a slightly-made man of middle height, with a complexion as clear and delicate as a woman's. His black hair had a natural wave; his features were perfect in their classic regularity, and his eyes were of deep intense blue. In every point he answered to the ideal lover Evelyn had described.

"Is it possible?" gasped Mrs. Dale. "Are you really Peter's son?"

"His only son," answered the stranger kindly; "and it is not my fault I have been so long in making your acquaintance, Aunt Maria. My wish was to come over to England long ago, but my father could not spare me. Even now I have only a very short leave of absence. I must return to the colony in October."

A strange fear flashed across May's mind. It wanted three months to October. Was this unknown cousin to be their guest all that time? She hated herself for the idea, but it troubled her nevertheless.

"When did you land?" asked Mrs. Dale. "How I wish we had known, then one of us might have come to meet you."

"I landed on Tuesday," said Ben. "I had some business to see to for my father, or I should have been down here before. I've taken lodgings at Clapham which our lawyer recommended to me. It's no distance, and I hope to come over often and see a great deal of you all!"

"I hope you will give us as much time as you can spare," said Mrs. Dale warmly. "You shall have a hearty welcome, Ben, though I'm afraid things here must be very different from what you're used to."

Benjamin Dale stayed to supper, and spent the evening with his relations. He made himself most entertaining and agreeable, giving them a long description of his colonial home, speaking with much affection of his father, and though he said nothing that could be called boasting, yet making it very plain Peter Dale was a very great man indeed in his adopted country.

"I wanted him to come over with me, but he declared all those he knew and loved were dead and gone. I have promised not to be away more than three months, in fact I have already secured my return passage in the *Oceania*, which sails on the first of October."

"And did you come to England on business or pleasure?" asked Evelyn.

"Both. I wanted to see the old country about which every one talked, and——" he looked very intently at his pretty cousin, "there is something my father has very much at heart, which could only be gratified by my visiting England."

"What was it?" asked Mrs. Dale, suspiciously.

"He is getting an old man now, and his desire for some years has been that I should marry. I don't like Colonial girls, they are vain and frivolous. Ever since I thought of the subject at all, I made up my mind to have an English wife, and so you see," lowering his voice, and giving another admiring glance at Evelyn, "I have come over to look for her!"

Of course the three ladies sat up till midnight discussing their stranger kinsman. Mrs. Dale

was loud in his praise. She declared he reminded her of her husband in his young days. Evelyn thought cousin Ben perfectly delightful. May was more reserved, and only said he seemed very lively. The others never guessed that she had compared him in her mind with their "paying guest," and found Ben wanting.

### CHAPTER III.

"AND you are really comfortable, Douglas?" asked his mother, when the fortnight's holiday was at an end, and her son was driving her to the station in the shabby little basket-carriage which was the only conveyance the Carews boasted.

"Yes, I'm as jolly as a sandboy," he answered, cheerfully; "and, mother, you were right in not letting me have one of the girls; it would have been awfully dull for her."

A smile crossed Mrs. Carew's face.

"You see, Douglas, you're twenty-six, and your income now is far larger than your father's when we married. One of these days you'll be taking a wife, and it wouldn't have been fair to you to let one of the girls get so used to living with you, she would not like to give way to a sister-in-law."

"You're right, mother; I believe you always are. I'm down for promotion, you know; I shall get the first branch managership that falls vacant. That will mean a house over the bank in some little country town, and three hundred a year."

Mrs. Carew smiled again.

"Is the wife chosen, Douglas?"

"Whatever makes you ask?"

"Only until now, if ever I spoke of your marriage you have always assured me you should live and die a bachelor, and as you didn't say so this time, I thought perhaps my future daughter-in-law had been discovered."

Douglas looked conscious.

"So far discovered, mother, that I know now there's only one girl in the world I'd care to marry; but you must keep this to yourself. I don't want my confidence to extend to father and the girls."

"Is it Miss Dale?"

"Whatever made you think so?"

"When your father said it was a regular plan for widows with grown up daughters to take boarders who developed into sons-in-law, you got so awfully angry I began to have my suspicions."

"I shall not tell you if they were right. I thought my father awfully hard on Mrs. Dale. She's a lady if she is poor, and I'm sure she's done a great deal for me."

"You look very different from what you did at Easter," admitted Mrs. Carew. "But Douglas, you must make allowance for your father. The name of Dale has most painful associations for him."

It was the son's turn to look surprised now.

"Why, mother, I never even heard the name till I went to Florence-road."

"We don't talk of it, Douglas, but a great many years ago your father had a very pretty sister to whom he was much attached; she went out to the Cape as a governess in spite of all her brother could say; you see he was poor, Douglas, and she was too proud to be a burden on him. Well, at the Cape she met a Mr. Dale, a very rich diamond merchant, and married him."

"I don't call that 'very painful associations,' mother," protested Douglas.

"You have not heard all. Your Aunt Lucy and your father corresponded regularly; she was evidently very rich, we were very poor; we married, you know, on a curacy, and there were three children before you. Things were very bad for us just before you were born. We had all had a kind of malignant fever, which raged in the parish. There were doctor's bills, invalid comforts, and the expense of three little funerals. It was an awful time, Douglas, and your father, unknown to me, wrote to your Aunt Lucy to ask her to help us. A loan of twenty pounds was what he asked for; she was so rich it would have been a trifle to her."

"And she refused?"

"She took no notice whatever of the letter. From that day to this we have never heard from her. Up to the time of our asking her for help she had written by every mail."

"A nice sort of sister!" said Douglas, bitterly.

"I have always thought it was her husband's fault. Peter Dale was twelve years older than Lucy. The money was his not hers, and he may have resented your father's asking her for help. I can imagine poor Lucy did not like to write and say she was not allowed to help us, but the shortest letter would have been a kindness to us compared with that awful silence."

"Mother," said Douglas, after a long pause, "what do you think of this: the Dales I know have an Uncle Peter who lives in South Africa and has made a fortune in diamonds; it sounds as though he must be Aunt Lucy's husband."

"It does indeed, Douglas, if only you could hear something about her, just that she was well and happy, you're father would be so thankful."

"Had she any children?"

"Not when she wrote last; we gathered it was a great disappointment."

"The Uncle Peter the Dales talk of has one son Benjamin, so called because he was born after several years of married life, and was the son of his father's old age, but oddly enough I never heard any mention of the mother."

"You will try and find out! Mrs. Dale won't mind your curiosity, if you explain."

"She is much too easy-going to mind it in any case; besides, she is fond of talking about Peter. He always sends the girls a box of ostrich feathers at Christmas, in consequence of which they have something like forty feathers apiece. Mrs. Dale consulted me gravely once as to whether Peter could be offended if they exchanged them for something more useful."

The train was due when they reached the station, so the adieux were very short.

Mrs. Carew's reflections as she drove back to the Rectory were that before very long she should be called on to welcome one of the Misses Dale as her daughter-in-law.

It was a lovely August afternoon when Douglas strolled leisurely down Florence-road, leaving his bag to the mercy of a porter, but carrying the nosegay of sweet old-fashioned flowers he had gathered that morning in the Rectory garden. It felt more like coming home than returning to a stranger's house, and Sarah's smiling welcome was very pleasant.

"You're just in time for tea, Mr. Carew. I've this minute taken it in. Miss Dale said it would be better not to wait as she didn't know what train you were coming by."

Douglas pushed open the dining-room door. May sat alone by the teatray, an open book beside her, a graver look on her face than he had often seen there.

"All alone, Miss Dale!" was his cheerful greeting. "Sarah says I'm in time for tea. I'm glad, for I'm awfully thirsty."

May welcomed him cordially, accepted the flowers as frankly as they were offered; and while Douglas went to wash his hands a second cup and saucer, and sundry additions to the meal appeared as though by magic; and when he came back the flowers, in an old china bowl, adorned the table.

"Did you have a pleasant holiday? It has been very fine here!"

"First-rate. We didn't have a single wet day. How's Mrs. Dale? I suppose she and Miss Evelyn are off to the Crystal Palace?"

"No; they are gone to Richmond for the day."

"And why didn't you accompany them?"

"I didn't want to. Mr. Carew, such a great deal has happened since you went away, I hardly know where to begin."

Douglas looked at her anxiously, now her face was in repose, he noticed that it was certainly paler and graver than when he went away. What could be the matter?

"I hope you have had no bad news?" he said, gently; "you are looking, forgive me, very far from well."

"I think I'm frightened," said May, slowly; "mother says I'm suspicious and fault-finding not

to rejoice in Evy's happiness; but it isn't that, really, Mr. Carew, it's only that everything has come so suddenly I feel quite dazed."

Carew dropped his knife and fork in bewilderment.

"Tell me all about it," he said, kindly. "Your words would imply your sister is engaged to be married; but there was no talk of it when I went away."

"I should like to tell you everything," said May, simply; "but please take your tea first, I'm sure it's getting cold."

So they finished their tea, and then when Sarah had removed all traces of the meal, and gone out on a long errand, May sat down by the open window and began her story.

"It was the very night you went away, Sarah came in and said Mr. Dale wanted to see mother, and it was Cousin Ben from Africa."

Douglas dropped his pipe in amazement. Coming so suddenly after his talk with his mother this was startling.

"But, Miss Dale, people don't come all the way from Africa just to call on unknown relations."

May looked troubled.

"He told mother he should have come to England long ago only his father could not spare him, and even now he is only here on a very short visit. He must sail for the Cape on the first of October."

"Just seven weeks hence."

"Yes. He said he had come partly on business for Uncle Peter and partly for his own pleasure. His lawyer had taken rooms for him at Clapham, and so he hoped to see a great deal of us."

"I was afraid you were going to tell me he wanted to stay with you, and I know you would not have room unless you turned me out," said Douglas.

"I don't like going on," said May, simply, "it sounds as though I was always thinking of such things; but he told us that first night he had come to England to find a wife, colonial girls were idle and frivolous. He had made up his mind long ago to choose an English wife."

"Well," said Douglas, kindly, "I've heard before colonials are very impulsive and outspoken. I suppose Mr. Dale wanted to prove how entirely he accepted you as relations by confiding his plans to you."

May shook her head.

"It's only a fortnight ago," she said, gravely; "but it seems like a lifetime. Benjamin has been here nearly every day, and on Thursday he spoke to mother. He said he wanted to marry Evelyn. His father wished him to see his cousins before he made any other acquaintances, in short—I can't tell it properly, Mr. Carew—they are engaged, and the wedding is to be next month, so that Evy can sail with him in the *Oceania* on the first of October."

Douglas took the girl's hand in his and pressed it as a friend or brother might have done. Then he looked straight into her beautiful dark eyes, and asked, gently,—

"Will you try and tell me why you dislike the engagement? I can see quite well that you are worrying dreadfully about it; but I shall never believe you either fault-finding or suspicious. Is it that you dislike your cousin, or that the suddenness of the whole thing alarms you, or just that you hate the thought of parting from your sister? I'm sure I wonder Mrs. Dale consented to see Miss Evelyn go so far away."

"Ben promises to bring her back in six months," explained May; "and now to answer your questions. It's not the hurry or the distance only that I dislike, there's something about Ben that frightens me. I don't believe he's sincere. I don't think he loves Evelyn, or that he will make her happy, and when I try to warn mother and make her careful she gets angry, and says I am only so spiteful because I dislike the idea of Evy marrying before me, and making such a brilliant match."

Douglas looked at the girl with a great indignation on his face.

"It must be very hard for you to bear, but no one else could think that of you, Miss Dale; May, your mother only says it probably because



she feels she has consented to your cousin's wishes too readily."

"Mother seems delighted with him, he has completely fascinated her and Evy!"

"Now shut your eyes," said Douglas, with a quiet air of authority, "and try to forget I am here. Try to think you are alone and just going over your objections to Benjamin Dale in your own mind, only speak them aloud."

She understood him at once; she closed her eyes, and for a moment seemed searching wildly in her mind for arguments; then she said slowly,—

"He may admire Evelyn, he could hardly help it; but he doesn't love her. When he came first he was just as attentive to me, only I showed him I did not like it. If he marries Evy it will be from some other reason than love. Her childish ways annoy him, he looks quite angry sometimes. Besides, if he loved her as much as he says, he would not be so insistent they should return to Africa so soon. Mother and Evy wanted him to leave her here with us while he went back to tell his father, but he won't hear of that."

"When does he wish to be married?"

"As soon as possible, on the first of September, I think. Evy said it would be nice to be married just before they sailed, but Ben will not wait. He seems," May's voice grew incoherent, "terrified lest anything should happen to break off the engagement, and yet he is not in love with her!"

"You are quite sure he is your cousin, asked Douglas, anxiously; "it may seem a far-fetched idea, but one hears of all kinds of frauds."

"If he is not our cousin, how did he find out our address? Besides, mother says he is just like my father, and he has shown us letters and papers which quite prove his story, only—"

"Only," said Douglas gravely, "you are not convinced; you have some doubt still."

May shivered.

"He must be Benjamin Dale, and our cousin; everything goes to prove it; but if he never was in England before, it is strange how perfectly he knows his way about London, and how thoroughly at home he seems."

"And yet you won't let me call him an impostor."

"People don't try such schemes for nothing," said May gravely. "If Evelyn were an heiress I could believe his whole story was false; but she has not a penny while mother lives. Then you know we are quite poor; there's nothing to be gained by knowing us, and Ben is heir to an enormous fortune, so things must be right, only I—feel frightened."

"There is one thing you could do which would settle the question for ever," said Carew practically; "but it would cost a good deal of money, and perhaps make your mother very angry."

"What is it?"

"If you have your uncle's address you might cable out to him. You need not ask if Benjamin were really his son or anything of that sort. You might ask for his consent to the engagement; then if anything was wrong he would be sure to cable back."

"It would make mother very angry."

"And cost eight shillings a word. I fear the message could not be very brief, as you must give your address. It might cost over five pounds."

May shook her head.

"Uncle Peter has always sent very kind letters with the presents. I should not mind writing to him; do you think there would be time for him to get my letter and cable back if anything was wrong?"

"Not in time to stop the marriage. You see the mail went this morning, you have lost a week."

May leant her head on her hands and sighed.

"It is very wrong of me to worry you over my foolish fancies; but, Mr. Carew, though Evy is only three years younger than I am, she always seems such a child compared to me, and mother has petted her so she has never known any trouble except small means, and I can't bear to think of her married to a man of whom she knows so little."

"You only pain me by talking of 'worrying

me," said Douglas; "I should like to feel your troubles were mine. If I see your cousin to-night I may be able to judge better; but, I fear, if I am not to anger your mother, I must keep my sentiments to myself."

Ben is not coming here to-night," said May; "he has promised to stay with his lawyer till Monday. I could not help being delighted, we should have Evy all to ourselves for Sunday."

"Is she happy? Do you think she cares for him?"

"I think she is happy, she seems lost in a whirl of excitement. Mother is perfectly radiant; she seems ten years younger since Ben came."

They could hear Mrs. Dale's knock at the door. Douglas drew a few steps nearer to May.

"I will never betray your confidence. If you will only trust me and believe I have no greater pleasure than to serve you!"

And the next moment Mrs. Dale was shaking hands effusively with her paying guest, and saying,—

"You must congratulate me, Mr. Carew, Evelyn is engaged to her cousin Benjamin, a very rich man, and one of the nicest young fellows you ever met."

#### CHAPTER IV.

USUALLY Douglas Carew was a good sleeper, possessing those two necessities for ensuring restful nights, a good conscience and perfect health; but that first night after his return to Florence-road he was awake till the small hours of the morning, his mind busy with conflicting doubts.

He could hardly understand the great interest he took in the Dales. After all he had known them a very short time, and had come to them a perfect stranger; but he had shared their simple home-life long enough to like them warmly. He could not bear the idea of trouble coming to the gentle kindly widow, or of disappointment clouding Evelyn's pretty blue eyes, and yet the more he thought over May's confidence, the more perplexed he felt as to cousin Benjamin's motives.

He made up his mind on one point, he would say nothing of what he heard from his mother. He would not complicate things still more by telling Benjamin he also was a cousin. He would try and make friends with the young colonial apart from the fact of the relationship, and ascertain, if possible, whether the engagement to Evelyn had come about simply from love at first sight, or had any ulterior motive.

"Evelyn's one of the prettiest girls I ever met," admitted Douglas, "but to propose after a few days acquaintance seems odd. Perhaps it's the fashion in the colony, and if he's very much in love it's natural enough for him to dislike the idea of leaving his bride behind him; when he goes back to Africa it may be right enough. Besides, what in the world has he to gain by marrying the girl for anything but love? She hasn't a shilling while her mother lives, and Mrs. Dale's not fifty. If he were an impostor he'd sponge on them, and get all he could out of them; but from May's account he has plenty of money and seems to pay the piper on all occasions. I'm beggared if I can make it out. All the same it's hard lines for Mrs. Dale to call May jealous and suspicious when she's only just ordinarily careful. Well, when I see Mr. Benjamin Dale, I shall understand better what he's after."

That August Sunday was a very pleasant day. Douglas went to church with the three ladies, walking a little in advance with May while Evy followed with her mother.

"Your sister looks happy enough," he said, cheerfully. "I do hope things will turn out well, though in any case it will be hard on you to part from her."

May lowered her voice though they were quite out of earshot of the other two.

"Do you know Clapham, Mr. Carew—I mean have you any friends there?"

"I know it well. One of my fellow-clerks lives there. He married a year or two ago, and

has a pretty little house near the Clapham-station; but why do you ask?"

She hesitated.

"The only person in England Ben has spoken to us of is Mr. Bernard his lawyer, who lives in Ashley-road. He is staying with him now till Monday. Mr. Bernard took rooms for Ben near his own house, in fact, he seems to be his 'guide, philosopher and friend.'"

"If your cousin lodges near this Bernard it's a strange thing for him to go and stay with him, isn't it?"

"I thought so. Mr. Carew, I can't explain it to you, but if Mr. Bernard is—is nice it would make me feel so much easier. I wanted mother to go and see him, or at least write before she gave her consent to the engagement, but she was only angry with me for suggesting it."

"If your cousin is Bernard's client he wouldn't be likely to say anything against him; but I think with you to know he was a lawyer of respectability and repute would be something. I've a general invitation from Ford, that's the fellow-clerk I spoke of, and I'll go home to tea with him to-morrow, and see what I can find out. Now, you're not to begin thanking me, Miss Dale. I assure you it's a pleasure to try and help you; beside, Ford's an awfully good fellow, and I really do owe him a visit."

"I don't know the number," said May, "but the address is Ashley-road, Clapham. We send our letters to Ben there too. I believe he is at Mr. Bernard's quite as much as at his own lodgings."

Mr. Ford was about Douglas Carew's own age; but he had come into the bank later, and advanced more slowly, so that he was under Carew in standing. They were great friends, and in the old days when Douglas lived with his aunt, Ford had often visited him. Of late they had not been quite so intimate, Douglas had been unable to indulge in visitors during his stay at Mrs. Dabbs' lodgings, and Ford had been very busy with domestic joys and cares, still the old friendship had never been disturbed and Douglas knew David Ford would give him all the assistance in his power.

"Ford, old man," he began, simply, when they left the bank and strolled towards the railway station—it was far too hot to hurry: "You've often asked me to see you, I wish you'd take me home this afternoon. I have a very particular reason for wanting to know something about Clapham, and I expect you're just the man to help me."

"Come along," said Ford, cheerfully. "Maggie will be so pleased. She hasn't set eyes on you since our wedding-day. We were saying last night you never meant to honour us with a visit."

"I've been coming lots of times. It seems a bad compliment only to do so when I really want your help."

"That's the right time to seek a friend," said Ford, kindly. "Not that I can believe you really want my help, for you look as jolly as a sand-boy."

By rare good fortune the two friends secured a railway compartment to themselves, and Douglas plunged into his story.

"I live with an awfully nice family at Herne Hill, widow and two daughters, with no relations in England; not desperately poor, but certainly not rich enough to make them a desirable prey to adventurers. While I was away for my holidays a young man appears upon the scene purporting to be Mrs. Dale's nephew from Africa. In ten days' time he proposed to the younger girl and was accepted; they are to be married next month and sail for Africa on the first of October."

"Quick work," said Ford thoughtfully; "is the young man well off?"

In a very few words Douglas told him all he knew of "Cousin Ben," not forgetting May's strange fears.

"I assure you, Ford, Miss Dale's not the sort of girl to take up a prejudice easily; she's just wrapped up in her pretty little sister, and it's genuine anxiety about the girl's future that makes her uneasy, not jealous of her splendid prospects."

Ford removed his pipe to answer slowly,—

"Well, you know, Carew, I call it an awful risk; they have not the least proof the man is not an impostor."

"No; only what could an impostor have to gain from these simple women?"

Ford shook his head.

"Can't say, but, old man, one thing's easy: if you know the ship he came home in you can apply for a list of passengers who arrived by it, and if the name of Benjamin Dale appears in the list it will be something in his favour."

"I never thought of that; what a splendid head you have."

"Not at all! Meanwhile I'm awfully curious to know what Clapham has to do with the mystery, and what you want to find out about that unpretending district."

"I'm coming to that; so far as Miss Dale knows her cousin has only one intimate acquaintance in England, his father's lawyer. This gentleman lives at Clapham, and has taken lodgings for Benjamin close to his own house, but in spite of that the two are so much attached that Mr. Dale went to stay from Saturday to Monday with his adviser."

Ford looked grave.

"Of course there are lawyers and lawyers; the man may not practise in Clapham, but just have his private house there; still, as my wife's father is a doctor who has practised in Clapham for over twenty years, I'm pretty sure to be able to find out something from him, and now here we are, and I'm sure Maggie will be as pleased to see you as I am."

A nice little matron received Douglas very prettily, and the high tea which was presently served was a very pleasant meal; but when the cloth was removed and pipes (Maggie Ford did not object to people smoking in her dining-room) introduced, the conversation took a grave turn.

"Douglas needs a little information about a lawyer who lives in Clapham, Maggie. I've told him you're more likely to be able to help him than I am, seeing you have lived here all your life."

"You mustn't think me curious," said Douglas to his hostess; "the fact is a friend of mine is very anxious about the matter."

Mrs. Ford smiled.

"I'm afraid I don't know a single lawyer in Clapham, but I dare say father does. What is the name and address?"

"The name is Bernard, and he lives in Ashley-road."

But both his listeners looked so suddenly grave at these words that Douglas felt convinced they knew something very much to Mr. Bernard's detriment.

"Do tell me the truth," he urged; "the matter is a very serious one to a dear friend of mine, and I would far rather know the worst."

David Ford looked decidedly uncomfortable. He was thinking of the outline of the story Douglas had given him, and deciding that Evelyn Dale's prospects looked black enough if her lover was a friend and comrade of Mr. Bernard.

"This is Ashley-road," said Maggie suddenly, "and that house opposite is Mr. Bernard's; if you had looked at the gate you must have read the name on the brass plate."

Douglas was standing near the window, he looked across the road as she spoke and saw a small, dingy-looking house whose dreary appearance made it quite a blot on the pleasant aspect of the road.

It was semi-detached, and must have been a heavy trial to the tenants on the other side, whose windows were full of flowers, and whose white curtains were of dainty muslin.

Desolation and neglect seemed stamped on everything about Mr. Bernard's residence; the grass was long and rank, the railings broken, the windows screened more than half way up by blinds of hideous black tarlatan, curtains there were none; the little front garden was overrun with weeds, even the brass plate was tarnished.

It was David Ford who broke the long pause—

"That house and the adjoining one belong to Mr. Bernard; he has lived here for years; my wife declared the very sight of that miserable looking place set her against Ashley-road, but he is the only objectionable neighbour we possess, and, as

I tell Maggie, we are not bound to look at his windows."

"Not bound," agreed Maggie, "but somehow we can't help it; still I am very fond of Ashley-road, and as Mr. Bernard is not the only person who doesn't try to make the best of his abode, if we moved to-morrow, we should not, perhaps, be better off."

"But I'm afraid seeing the house Bernard lives in will make Carew uneasy," said David, thoughtfully. "I hate scandal, old fellow, but someone will tell you the truth if I don't. John Bernard may be a lawyer, but the calling he exercises here needs no particular legal skill; he is a money-lender, and judging from the number of people I have myself seen going up to his door, I should say he made a very successful thing of it."

"He is something in the City as well," put in Maggie. "He only sees people here three evenings a week, from six till eight. Mr. Carew, when I can, I always sit at the back of the house on those evenings. I can't bear to see the stream of people who flock over the way; there are men and women of all ranks, from the lady who dismisses her cab at the bottom of the road to the working man's wife who carries a half starved baby in her arms, from the fashionable young officer with his military air to the shabby City man. I can't bear to see them; I seem to know they are on the road to misery and ruin when they pass through that gate."

"Have you ever seen Mr. Bernard himself?" asked Douglas, anxiously. "Have you any idea what he is like?"

"I have seen him dozens of times. He often goes up to town by the same train as I do," replied David. "He's tall, rather portly-looking, with silvery hair and a benevolent looking face. You'd be more likely to take him for a philanthropist than a money lender until you notice that his eyes—they are light blue and rather small—never by any chance meet yours, and that there is something cruel about his mouth."

"Mr. Carew!" cried Maggie, impulsively, "don't say you have any dealings with this man; I can't bear to think any friend of David's is at his mercy."

"I never heard of Mr. Bernard till yesterday. I told David to day why I was so interested in him. I should like to tell you too, if you would have patience to listen to a long story."

"Maggie will enjoy it," said her husband. "It's not often she has a chance of listening to a romance in real life."

Maggie listened with most flattering attention, then she said, gently,—

"It must be very hard on you, Mr. Carew."

"Oh no!" exclaimed Douglas, "it's hard on her sister, who is wrapped up in her, and Evy's such a pretty little thing, I wouldn't like trouble to come to her, but I have no right to mind her marrying."

"Oh, I thought—"

"I told you Maggie was romantic," put in Mr. Ford. "She's been filling in the blanks in your story, Douglas, and making you Mr. Dale's rival and hopelessly in love with his de-tined bride."

"I'm not," said Douglas, stoutly, "but I do want to save the child if I can help it."

"There has been a very good-looking young man over the way lately," said Maggie. "I put him down as a fresh victim."

"Dark and rather foreign looking."

"Yes, and with very blue eyes. He was there all day yesterday. I thought it was getting too strong if Mr. Bernard took to money-lending on Sundays."

"But he seems very flush of money—Benjamin Dale, I mean—and his father's awfully rich. There seems no reason in the world why he should have to go a money-lender."

"Look here, Douglas," said Mr. Ford, thoughtfully, "the true Benjamin Dale would be a rich man, but an impostor representing him would be poor enough. If you take my advice you'll let the elder sister write to her uncle by next mail, asking him to cable back if he consents to the engagement; you'd hear by the twelfth of September. Surely she can make some excuse to

postpone the wedding for a fortnight, they'd have nearly three weeks then before they sailed, and it might be as well if you looked in at the offices of the steamer, in the meantime, and see if Mr. Dale's name appears in the list of passengers."

"And if you can get introduced to 'Cousin Ben,' I'll soon find out if he goes on coming here," promised Maggie.

It was quite early when Douglas reached Florence-road. He found that Mr. Dale had not left, so the introduction could take place at once.

Cousin Ben met the "paying guest" with the utmost cordiality. He treated Douglas exactly as though he had been a friend of his own. An hour or so passed in very pleasant conversation, and presently, when Ben rose to take leave he invited the boarder to walk to the station with him.

"It's such a lovely night, and a breeze will do you good."

Douglas agreed. He could not in the least understand his own feelings. He had expected to shrink from Benjamin Dale with something like loathing.

He had rather looked down on Mrs. Dale and Evelyn for being so easily pleased, but he was conscious now that but for May's warning he himself would have been enormously taken with the stranger.

He was almost ready to believe she had been too hard on her cousin, and as for Maggie Ford's theory that he was the friend and ally of a money-lender, it must be a mistake.

Ben could not have any idea of Bernard's real business. Perhaps his father and the money-lender had been friends in early youth, and Mr. Dale, believing in Bernard's honesty had commended his son to his care.

"I like England enormously," was Ben's first remark as they turned into the quiet road. "If it wasn't for my old father there's nothing would please me better than to settle down here, but the dear old man hates the very thought of coming over to England. I shall have to live there part of the year with him and come over here for a visit every summer."

"You evidently believe in the saying, 'Happy's the wooing that's not long adding,' for I never heard of a more rapid courtship than yours. It quite took my breath away."

"Well, she's a dear little thing, and if I waited that queer elder sister would poison her mind against me. Besides, to let you into the secret Carew, as you seem a sort of family friend, I must marry Evelyn before my father knows I'm thinking of it, or he'd write over and forbid the banns."

"Do you mean he'd be against it?"

"Awfully, if his consent was asked beforehand. He can't bear Aunt Maria. He's never seen her; but he's taken up the notion she was beneath my uncle in birth. Oh, I should never get his consent to marrying Evy; but when I take her out there, and he sees what a dear little thing she is, he'll be delighted."

"You're not afraid of his possible displeasure?"

"Not a bit. He's settled a good round sum on me, and I could keep my wife in clover if he never gave me another sixpence; but he'll come round when once he's seen her."

"Your mother is dead, I believe," said Douglas, thinking he might as well clear up the point of whether Mrs. Dale had really been his Aunt Lucy.

"She died when I was born. I never heard much about her, not even her maiden name. She was years younger than my father. Came out to the Cape as a governess, and married him directly. It was n't a happy union, I fancy. He wanted an heir, and she fretted after her own relations in England."

Douglas felt pretty certain his Aunt Lucy had been this prosperous young man's mother. Also that his father's appeal for help had never reached her. Arriving just after her death, what more likely than that her husband, engrossed with his grief, should never trouble to answer it.

"I don't see why we shouldn't be friends," said Ben, good temperedly, when they reached the station. "We are likely to see a good deal of each other in the next few weeks, and I've no



chums in England, so it would be pleasanter for us both."

He put out his hand as he spoke, and Douglas could hardly refuse to take it, though he felt himself almost a traitor to May for thus making a seeming alliance with the man she dreaded.

## CHAPTER V.

DOUGLAS CAREW had talked of going down to Ashley-road again, and trying to find out what Benjamin Dale's relations with the money-lender really were; but Mr. Ford took his holiday almost directly after Carew's first visit, and it was rather a relief to Douglas to have an excuse for not going to Clapham. He felt himself in the most awkward position.

Ben treated him with marked cordiality, always seeming to regard him as a friend. There was nothing in the stranger's bearing or conversation at Spenser Villas to which Douglas could take exception. And the latter was sometimes almost inclined to fancy May's anxiety about her sister prejudiced her against her cousin.

For Ben seemed the very soul of good nature, and appeared honestly in love with Ery. He was always trying to find some new pleasure for his pretty little betrothed. There was nothing he would not do for her. And he talked of his African home so frankly, it was impossible to believe him an impostor. He was perfectly well-informed in the family history, alluded to Mr. Dale (Evelyn's father), and how they had missed his letters.

Try as he would, Douglas could find no flaw in Ben's statements; and the hurry for his wedding-day, which May believed came from a bad motive, might after all be only the impatience of an eager lover.

"I see he has bewitched you," said May to the paying guest one evening, when they had all gone to see the fireworks at the Crystal Palace, and, as was natural, had divided into two pairs. Mrs. Dale had not joined the expedition, but was expecting the quiet home to a cosy little supper.

"He has not bewitched me," replied Douglas, very gravely. "There are times when I think of all your arguments, and fancy there *must* be something in them. But we can prove nothing against your cousin, and so, as Evelyn is evidently in love with him, it seems best to give him the benefit of the doubt. It would be cruel to distress her with our fears unless we could prove something against him."

"I suppose it would. I wanted to tell you one thing, Mr. Carew; I wrote to Uncle Peter."

"When?"

"The next mail day after you came home. I could not help it. I know his answer—even if he cables—can't come before the wedding. But it seemed to me I must do something. I could not sit still and make no effort to save her."

"The wedding is really to be in September?"

"Yes, on the fourth. The day they first spoke of was a Friday, and Ery is just superstitious enough to be afraid of that; then mother disliked Saturday, and so it is to be the fourth."

"Monday fortnight," said Douglas, reflecting, after a rapid calculation, that this change of date had made it just possible—only just—for Peter Dale to cable a reply to May's letter before the ceremony.

"Yes," she said, when he mentioned this. "Saturday is their mail-day. But if the steamer is unusually quick, they get their letters sometimes on a Friday. If Uncle Peter cabled, even early on Saturday morning, it would be in time."

It flashed on Douglas suddenly that Ben had told him his father would certainly refuse his consent if it were asked for before the marriage. Was it possible Ben had said this to prevent any one writing to the old man.

"I should not wonder," said May, slowly, when he mentioned this, "it would be just like him."

"How you hate your cousin, Miss Dale."

"I don't," and her voice was quite sad, "indeed I don't hate him, only I am puzzled. Every day I feel more certain that this man is not cousin Ben at all but an impostor, and yet I can-

not make anyone else see it too; the things which seem to me such proofs of his deception, no one else notices."

"Tell me what they are."

"You are his friend," she said, reproachfully.

"I am not. While there seemed a chance of proving your suspicions just, I would have moved heaven and earth to break off the engagement, but now—"

"It seems to you too late?"

"Not too late if you have any proofs."

"Mr. Carew, Ben came to us a stranger to England; he had never been to the Crystal Palace in his life till he came with us to-night, yet how perfectly he finds his way about in this huge building; he was never once at a loss; he knew where to go for tea, where to secure places for the fireworks—he seemed perfectly at home, as though he had been coming here for years."

Douglas hesitated, and May went on:

"The other day he took mother and Evelyn to Richmond; they changed at Clapham Junction, a station which confuses even Londoners, but Ben was never once at a loss; at Richmond he pointed out everything of interest to them just as though he were a living guide book."

"It has struck me as wonderful how he finds his way about London," admitted Carew; "but then some people do have a much better bump of locality than others."

"He talks of theatres and plays as though he had been to them constantly: there is not a single piece of note he does not seem to have seen, and yet I never heard that there were many theatres in Africa. He positively laughed when someone asked if he had ever seen any snow, though he explained afterwards snow was very common 'up country.'"

"I believe it is," admitted Carew. "Miss Dale, I don't know what to say. I fear you think me a half-hearted confidante, but I am not; it is only I don't see a single step to take which might not bring bitter trouble upon your sister."

"You mean—?"

"I mean we ought not to move until we have positive proof that this man is an impostor; nothing but the plainest proofs will convince your mother; if we had only doubts and fears to lay before her, not only would she refuse to hear us, but she would very likely consent to the marriage being hastened as a proof of her confidence in her nephew."

"And you think there is *nothing* we can do?"

"We might have Ben 'shadowed,' as the detectives call it, but I doubt if we should discover anything, while I need not tell you that if he found us out, he would separate you from your sister entirely after the marriage."

"He would do that in any case, I fear. I believe he dislikes me thoroughly."

"He can't," said Douglas, "it must be your fancy."

She shook her head.

"I am quite sure of it. I believe he has only made such efforts to gain your friendship because he sees you are the only person I could look to for help; he distrusts me quite as much as I do him."

Douglas looked at her anxiously.

"I made one discovery I ought to have told you at the time, only I feared to add to your fears. Mr. Bernard is not known in Clapham as a lawyer, but as a money-lender. I have been to his house, and I assure you a more wretched looking place I never set eyes on."

"What does that prove?"

"I can't say. Thirty years ago, Bernard may have been a promising young lawyer of strict integrity. In his distant home there would be no one to tell your uncle Peter of the change in his friend. Old Mr. Dale might send his son to England with instructions to take Bernard as his mentor."

"He might."

They had wandered far away from the spot where a crowd had assembled to watch the display of fireworks; in those beautiful grounds Douglas and May were, to all intent, alone. It must have been this which gave Carew the courage to plead his own cause.

"May," he said, with a deep earnestness in his voice, "I wonder if you have any idea how

nearly this matter touches me. Mrs. Dale accuses you of selfish motives in objecting to your sister's engagement; she might truthfully accuse me of such motives."

"You!" exclaimed May, "why?"

"Because I have the strongest possible object in regretting Evelyn's wealthy marriage. Were things as when I first came to Florence-road, I think in time I might have won your mother's consent to my wishes, but with one daughter engaged to a wealthy colonial merchant, she is not likely to consent to give the other to a poor bank clerk. Haven't you guessed my secret, dear? Don't you know that I love you with all my heart and strength, and that I have only kept silent because I felt till your anxieties about Evelyn were relieved you could not listen to me?"

May said nothing, but the hand which rested on Carew's arm was not withdrawn, and this silent encouragement emboldened him to proceed.

"Since that first meeting when I saw you, I began to think of—this. To feel how bright a place my home would be if I could win you for its queen. My love for you grew and deepened every week that came. I hoped when I got my promotion and a branch management, to persuade you to listen to me; but, May, I can't keep silent any longer. Even if you refuse me you can count on my friendship to do all that can be done for Evelyn. But, my darling! if only I have some hope of winning you to cheer me on, I shall feel like a new man."

"And you really thought of me like that?" she whispered.

"I have loved you so long, that I can't tell you when it began. It has made me almost indignant when Mrs. Dale seemed almost to forget she had any daughter but Evelyn, and I have felt positively grateful to cousin Ben, because it was your sister and not you, he sought."

Crash, crash in the distance. They could hear the rockets ascending in fiery streaks. But these two had utterly forgotten the purpose for which they came to Sydenham. They were living again in Paradise, as they told each other the old, sweet story.

"I never thought anyone could care for me when Evelyn was by," said May.

"I never could have cared for Evelyn when you were there," he answered. "May, can't you give me any hope?"

"I like you better than anyone in the world," confessed the girl. "You always seemed to me so true and strong. I felt I could trust you to help me in any difficulty."

"And you will trust me with yourself?"

"You ought to do a great deal better," said May, simply. "You know we haven't any money while mother lives; and if you and I are right, and there is anything wrong about cousin Ben, I dread to think of the confusion mother's affairs will be in."

"I don't want to do any better. I have two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and I have saved enough money to furnish a dear little house. May, if you are not afraid to be a poor man's wife, I shall be the happiest man in England."

"I am not afraid of anything with you."

He kissed her under the screen of the leafy trees, and May was too happy for a moment to remember Evelyn.

"I shall speak to your mother to-night," said Douglas. "I think she likes me, but I am afraid Evelyn's splendid prospects will have made her rather ambitious."

"Mother is very fond of you," answered May. "And I am not afraid of her consent, but—what will your people say?"

"My mother told me she quite expected to hear I was engaged to one of the Miss Dales. As for my father, he will love you dearly when once you have changed your name. He particularly dislikes the name of Dale, because his only sister married a Mr. Dale, and things turned out unhappily."

"The husband could not have been a relation of ours," replied May, "for my father always said he had no relations in England."

"Unless I am greatly mistaken, dear, my Aunt

Lucy was your Uncle Peter's wife, and Ben's mother."

"Douglas!"

"A great many things make me think so. She was last heard of the year Ben must have been born. And he says his mother died at his birth. Then my aunt married Peter Dale, a diamond merchant in South Africa."

"How wonderful it seems. Then Ben is your cousin too."

"Decidedly, if he is Benjamin Dale. But on that point I never feel quite certain. When I am with him I accept him entirely at his own valuation; but away from his fascinations (you must confess, May, he is a very taking fellow), I have my doubts."

Either Douglas and May were too engrossed with their new found happiness to remember the train they had fixed to return home by, or the other couple were in fault; for when they reached Sydenham Hill Station, they saw nothing of Evelyn and her lover, and when they got to Spenser Villas and found them still absent, they were quite prepared for a reprimand from Mrs. Dale.

But the widow's faith in her nephew was unlimited. She declared Ben would bring Evelyn home quite safely. It was early yet, and lovers could not be expected to be punctual.

May slipped upstairs to take off her things, and Douglas went straight to his point.

"Will you trust me with your daughter, Mrs. Dale? I will take the best care of her heart and strength can, if only you will let her be my wife."

"Marry May!" exclaimed the mother, in bewilderment. "Why, Mr. Carew, I never dreamed of such a thing. You must be crazy."

"Indeed, I'm not," declared Douglas. "I'm in sober, serious earnest. I'm not a rich man, but I hope very soon my income will be raised to three hundred a year, and I think we could manage on that."

"May is very economical, and three hundred would be plenty for her. But, Mr. Carew, I never thought my eldest girl would marry. She is three-and-twenty, and so sedate and prim in all her ways, I have made up my mind she would be an old maid."

"She is not prim," retorted Douglas. "And that gentle gravity is what first attracted me. I am nearly twenty-seven. I don't want a child-wife, Mrs. Dale, but a woman who can be a helpmeet to me. May and I have seen a great deal of each other, and I am sure we shall be happy, if only you will consent."

"I always liked you," said Mrs. Dale, "and I should be very glad to give you May, only, Mr. Carew, your father is a clergyman, and he may look higher for you. I shouldn't like any child of mine to enter a family where she was unwelcome. May isn't as attractive as Evelyn, but she is a dear, good girl."

"She is far more attractive than her sister in my eyes," said Douglas, frankly; "and you need not fear any opposition from my father. He is the kindest of men. And as he and my mother began life on a very humble income, he won't object to my marrying on moderate means. I hope, in a very few months, a year, at longest, to be manager of one of our branch banks, and then I shall have a home to offer May."

"I could not spare her now," said Mrs. Dale, "if you wanted her ever so. I can't lose both my children at once. And you know Evelyn is to be married on the fourth of next month."

At that moment May came back. Her mother kissed her fondly, and congratulated her. It was plain enough Mrs. Dale liked and trusted Carew. He was quite good enough for May, though some weeks back she had been dreadfully uneasy at the bare idea of Ery's fancying him. But May was used to her sister's being preferred before her in all things by their mother, and was quite content as things were.

They sat down to supper, but no one ate much. The lovers were too happy, and as the minutes passed, bringing no sign of the other pair, Mrs. Dale grew decidedly uneasy.

"I can't make it out," she said for, perhaps, the twentieth time, as the clock struck the half-hour.

"Benjamin has never kept Evelyn out so late before. They are always in by eleven."

"Perhaps they waited for us," said Douglas, but he did not really think it likely, and only made the suggestion to relieve Mrs. Dale's fears.

They waited a little longer, each of the three growing thoroughly alarmed. Douglas was on the point of going round to the station to know if the last train from the Palace had come in, when they heard a faint, unsteady knock at the door, and Mrs. Dale, rushing to open it, found Ery standing on the threshold alone pale and trembling, and with a terrified look on her pretty face, which went straight to her mother's heart.

"Where is Ben?" cried Mrs. Dale. "Surely he never left you to come home alone!"

"It was in the crowd," said Ery, faintly. "I got parted from him for a moment, and when I looked round he was gone. I suppose I ought to have kept still, and he would have come back to look for me; but I turned in the direction I thought he must be in and so I could not find him. I waited there so long the Palace seemed quite empty, and I was so frightened I came away."

Douglas had poured her out a glass of wine, wine was very seldom seen at Spenser Villas, but a bottle had been opened in honour of Ben. Carew stood over the girl while she drank it.

"Don't be frightened now," he said, tenderly. "You are safe at home with your mother and May."

"Surely child, you never came home alone," cried her mother, thinking of the long, lonely walk from the palace to Sydenham Hill station.

"I could not help it, mother. I was afraid to wait any longer. I think I'll go to bed now, I am so tired."

Mrs. Dale went upstairs with her. May lingered a moment at a glance from her lover.

"There is something the matter," he said very gravely. "Benjamin would never have left her alone without some grave cause."

"Then you don't think it was an accident?"

"I think he met someone who knew the truth about him, and one of two things, either he dared not let them see him with Evelyn, and so was forced to leave her for a moment, trusting to join her again as soon as the danger was past, or—"

"Go on, please, Douglas. Do tell me all."

"Or one of his accomplices insisted on an introduction to Evelyn, and she was so frightened at the man's appearance she hung behind and so got separated from them. I expect she will confide in you; don't try to prejudice her against Ben, but let her tell you all she can."

"Ery is asleep," said Mrs. Dale, as she kissed May outside the girl's room. "Take care you don't wake her, dear, she seems tired out."

But when the mother had gone downstairs, and May began to undress, a faint voice called her name, and going to the bedside, she saw that Evelyn was wide awake.

"I'm not asleep," she panted, "only mother seemed so worried, I let her think so."

"You must try to go to sleep now, dear, or you'll be tired to death. It's nearly one o'clock!"

"I must talk to you first. May you'll have to listen or I shall not close my eyes all night."

May folded a shawl round Evelyn's shoulders and sat down close to the girl to listen to her story.

It was very confused, but through it all one thing was clear, Ery's faith in her lover had received a terrible blow.

Ben had introduced her to Mr. Bernard, an old man with bold eyes, who stared at her till she felt quite hot.

"A regular white dove," he said to Ben. "She'll want a lot of training before she's ready for what you need. You'd better leave your baby here, my good fellow, and come and talk to me. I can tell you things won't stand waiting."

"Ben didn't like it," went on Ery, "but he seemed quite afraid of Mr. Bernard, and he asked me presently if I'd mind waiting for him. He would be back in five minutes, long before the fireworks began, and as the seats were numbered, no one could take his place."

"He ought not to have left you alone," said May, angrily.

"I was so glad to get rid of Mr. Bernard," confessed Evelyn, "I didn't mind at first; but after a while I got tired of being alone, and I fancied I saw people looking at me. Ben was in sight all the time, and I got up at last meaning to go to him, but—I couldn't."

"Why not?" asked May anxiously.

"Two men were between me and Ben, one of them pointed out Mr. Bernard to the other and said he was the greatest scoundrel who ever went unhung, and that his companion (Ben, you know) was just as bad. Wolves in sheep's clothing, he called them boldly, and said the curse of the people they had ruined would never leave them; and, oh, May, I was so frightened, and then Ben turned and saw me, he was awfully angry with me for leaving my seat. He said, I was prying into his secrets, and that I was as suspicious and interfering as you were."

"And then?" asked May, passing over the thrust at herself. "How did you get separated from Ben after that?"

"The fireworks were over, and there was a crush of people to get back to the Palace, when Mr. Bernard came up to us and began talking to Ben. I did not want to hear what they said. I was so afraid Ben would think I was prying again, and so I slipped back for him to go on with Mr. Bernard, and it was just as I told you all downstairs I could not find them again."

"And where was it?"

"Just as we were passing through the Palace to go out, they stopped by one of the refreshment places."

Two doubts crossed May's mind. Had Ben left her sister of his own free will or was the news Mr. Bernard had for him so important he was forced to stay and listen to it.

"I feel so frightened, May," went on poor Evelyn, tearfully. "I never saw Ben angry till to-night, and he looked terrible. And oh, May, supposing this Mr. Bernard really is a bad man how dreadful it would be, for Ben is ever so friendly with him. I can't sleep May. Whenever I close my eyes I seem to have those words ringing in my ears that Ben and Mr. Bernard are pursued by the curses of the people they have ruined. Oh, May, tell me it can't be true."

May did her best to soothe her poor little sister, but alas every word Evelyn spoke only confirmed her doubts, all she could do was to assure the poor girl that if Ben had only been in England a month he could not be the person to whom the gentlemen's words referred, they must have mistaken him for someone else and that since it was probable Evelyn's future life would be spent chiefly in Africa Mr. Bernard would not be able to make a tool and accomplice of her husband.

Soothed by her sister's gentle words and caresses Evelyn at last fell asleep, but the August sun was pouring into the room before May's troubled brain found rest in slumber.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE African mail fully justified May's hopes, and the letter she had written in so much fear and anxiety reached her uncle's house on Friday the first of September, the very day originally fixed for Evelyn's marriage.

Reached the house but not her uncle, for Peter Dale had been dead some weeks leaving his affairs entirely in the hands of George Harcourt, who had long successfully managed his business and been to him the prop and comfort of his old age.

Poor Peter Dale, when his sister-in-law in England, hard put to it sometimes to provide for her girls, had thought it a little unfair there should be such a gulf between their fortunes and their cousin Ben's, she little guessed the career of sin and reckless folly which had blighted Benjamin Dale's life.

For this son of his old age was a most grievous disappointment to Peter Dale, it would be hard to say what sin and bad habits Ben had not indulged in, only the constant anxiety his son's



evil ways entailed on him prevented Uncle Peter from inviting his two nieces to come out and make their home with him.

"I'll provide for the girls in my will," he told his trusted manager, George Harcourt, "but I can't have them out here, Ben may come home any time, and he's no fit company for innocent girls."

And early in the June, before the false Benjamin Dale came to Florence-road, the true Benjamin Dale ended his career, he was shot dead in a drunken quarrel, and even the father who had loved him better than aught else, could not regret him.

"I am thankful I have lived long enough to right all those Ren wrongs," he told Harcourt, "and now I feel my days are numbered and I had better make my will. I shall leave you sole-executor Harcourt. I want you to realise my property and divide it into three equal shares. I shall leave one to you in gratitude for your kindness to a lonely, old man, another to my brother's two daughters, Maria and Evelyn, and the last to my wife's family. Poor Lucy, she had one brother a clergyman who was very near her heart, his eldest son shall have a third of my wealth. I'll send for a lawyer and have it all arranged clearly so that there can be no mistake."

But while the will was being drawn in the lawyer's office it attracted the notice of one of his clerks, Bryan Derwent, an idle scamp of a fellow only two years out from England, and who was under notice to leave his present employer. Derwent and Ben Dale had been chums for a few months, and the lawyer's clerk knew quite enough of the diamond merchant's fortune to be aware that even a sixth of it would be a very large amount.

Bryan was good-looking, had very pleasant manners and could when he chose be very gentlemanly; he thought if only he could return to England and marry one of the Misses Dale before she heard of her uncle's legacy his fortune would be made.

Old Mr. Dale was very generous, it was easy for Derwent to go to him with a cleverly got-up story, that he had just heard of his father's death and his mother and sister were utterly unprovided for, if he could only get back to England it would be his privilege to work for them.

Peter Dale not only gave him his passage money but arranged with a bank in London to pay Mr. Derwent two hundred pounds on his arriving in England.

Derwent went straight to Mr. Bernard, whose assistant he had been in years gone by; he offered him a liberal price if he would assist him in tracing the Dales and do all he could to further his suit. He knew perfectly that the doctors had declared Peter Dale could not live many weeks; when he returned to Africa with his bride the good old man would be dead and his niece would thus be on the spot to claim her legacy.

There would probably be a little fuss when she discovered she had married not cousin Ben but Bryan Derwent a stranger of very indifferent repute, but by that time the marriage would be beyond recall and having her wholly in his power, thousands of miles away from her own relations, it would not be difficult to make her hear reason.

Such was Bryan Derwent's plot, his great anxiety to hurry on the marriage was natural as any mail from Africa might announce to Mrs. Dale her brother-in-law's death and the legacies left to her children. As such letter would be sure to mention that Ben had died before his father, the impostor's one object was to marry his prize before any news came from Africa.

And, will it be believed, of the two girls Bryan Derwent would far rather have married May; there was a quiet strength about her, a grave steadfastness of character which possessed a wonderful charm for the jaded nerves and sin-stained soul of the adventurer. But from the very first he saw that he should have no chance with May, and so fell back on the younger sister; after all their fortunes were equal and with Evelyn he had little trouble.

But to follow May's letter. It was delivered to George Harcourt, as was all the correspon-

dence that came for the deceased diamond-merchant.

He read it through with a very troubled face, and then carried it to his wife.

"It's clear, Fanny, some one is in England, passing himself off as poor Ben Dale, and persuading one of the girls to marry him."

Mrs. Harcourt started.

"Then it's that good-for-nothing clerk of Mr. Morton's—young Derwent. Depend upon it, he read the draft of the will, and decided one of poor Mr. Dale's nieces was a prize worth winning."

"So she would have been, only he has chosen the wrong sister."

"I thought a third of Mr. Dale's fortune was to be divided between his two nieces?"

"In the original draft; but he changed his mind afterwards, and left the whole to the elder sister, Maria. It seems she was her father's favourite. He wrote out to his brother she was so like their dead mother, and, after all those years, Peter Dale had a tender feeling for her."

"Something must be done at once," said Mrs. Harcourt quickly.

"It is Miss Dale who writes. She says the wedding is fixed for the First of September—to-day, by George!—but she shall use her utmost powers of persuasion to get it put off till the Fourth, by which time a cablegram could be received, giving her uncle's consent. It's a good letter, Fanny. She has been careful not to say a word that could hurt the old man's feelings, supposing her sister's lover is his son, and yet, all through one can see her doubts."

"There is only one thing for it, George—you must cable at once; you may be in time."

"I'll cable; but what am I to say that will be decided enough, and yet can be got into a few words?"

"Who were the bankers on whom Mr. Dale gave young Derwent a draft?"

"Porter & Co., Fleet-atreet."

"Then, as they must have seen him as Derwent, they could prove him an impostor."

"True; but I think the fact of Benjamin Dale's death will be enough. See, Fanny, how will this do?"

"Benjamin Dale died last June, so man must be an impostor. Letter on its way, due September Eleventh. Stop marriage."

"It'll cost a lot," said Harcourt gravely, "but Miss Dale won't grudge the money if it save her sister from being tied to a scoundrel. I'll send another to Porter & Co.;" and he quickly penned a brief message to the bankers, giving them May's address, and asking them to write to her at once.

A cloud seemed to rest on the little house in Florence-road after that expedition to the Crystal Palace. Cousin Ben was moody and excited by turns—sometimes as sulky as a bear, at others in the wildest spirits.

The result of Douglas Carew's inquiries had proved nothing against Mr. Dale, so all Carew and his fiancée could do was to pin their faith on May's letter to her uncle, and hope that a reply might come before the wedding-day.

It was to be an afternoon wedding, and a foreign shipping clerk told Douglas it was almost certain a cablegram could arrive in time.

The vessel which carried May's letter was the *Scot*, one of the smartest in the service, never known to be late. Unless Peter Dale was up country, the chances were they would hear by Saturday.

Evelyn herself, after that night's confession of her fear to May, never again alluded to the subject. She clung to Ben affectionately, and no one but her sister knew the element of dread which seemed to have crept into her devotion.

Mrs. Dale noticed the child was getting older and more womanly, but never guessed the cause. Her heart sank a dozen times a day at the thought of parting from her darling, but she never dreamed there was anything amiss with her future son-in-law's conduct.

Preparations for the wedding went on apace. Ben did not (as his aunt had hoped) insist on paying for the trousseau, nor did he suggest Evy should buy very few things now, and choose a liberal outfit when she was his wife. On the

contrary, he assured her clothes were very expensive in the colony, and she had better take a large supply.

It seemed to May she and her mother would have to live on bread and water for months to pay the bills which were accumulating; and she astonished Douglas one day by bursting into tears just after her sister had been gaily exhibiting her wedding-veil.

"It may turn out better than we think, dear," said Carew fondly. "Don't fret."

"I can't help it, Douglas. If Evy marries that man, I feel sure he will make her miserable. If her eyes are opened in time—mother will be nearly ruined, for she has bought such heaps of things; they must have cost thirty or forty pounds."

"Then you will have to remember my claim to help you, dear. We will furnish our nest a little more humbly, and lend a hand with the bills."

"Douglas, I do think you are the best man who ever breathed; mother's always slighting you and praising up Ben, yet—"

"Yet I decline to take offence; you see I happen to be very fond of your mother, May, and I'm afraid there's an awful awakening in store for her."

## CHAPTER VII, AND LAST.

It had come at last; the Saturday before the wedding, May went about with a heart-sickening suspense; in the next forty-eight hours Evelyn's fate would be decided. The very knowledge that her mother and sister never even suspected she had written to Uncle Peter, added to her burden.

"May," said Douglas Carew, as she walked down the Florence-road at his side, having a letter to post, she was going so far on the way to the station with him, "May, who are your mother's most trusted friends? If that cablegram comes you ought to have someone with her when you break the news."

"Mr. and Mrs. Ward live at Dulwich; he is mother's lawyer, and Mrs. Ward has been oh, so kind to us; they were away when you first came to us, and since that mother has been a little huffed with them because they think Evy's engagement rather hurried."

"Ah! I shall be in at three, May; if the cablegram comes I'll go over to Dulwich at once, and fetch Mrs. Ward, I am sure you can't manage alone."

May retraced her steps slowly, her heart was heavy; she found Mrs. Dale and Evy still lingering over their breakfast. The widow was just a little hurt because Ben had objected to her asking everyone she knew to an "afternoon tea" after the wedding, he himself was going to contribute not a single guest.

Douglas Carew was to be his best man, and May her sister's bridesmaid. The widow would give her daughter away, and positively those five would be the only persons to eat the beautiful wedding cake.

"Don't look so miserable, May," Evy said, throwing her arms round her sister's neck, "Ben will bring me home every year, and when you and Douglas get rich you must come out and see us."

"Douglas will never get rich," said Mrs. Dale rather complainingly; "he is a dear fellow but he has no ambition, besides, if anything happened to the Rector he would have to help his mother and sisters."

"I don't think I was cut out for a grand lady," said May pleasantly, "so it's just as well I'm not to marry a rich man. Evy, dear, what are you going to do to-day?"

"Oh Ben is coming early to take me to London; if you'll believe it, May, there are ever so many things mother and I have forgotten. I expect we shall stay at the Stores till we are literally turned out, then we shall get some lunch and come home quietly in the afternoon. Don't expect us till you see us, it may be four o'clock."

When the lovers had departed Mrs. Dale busied herself with the exquisitely fine marking of some of the trousseau garments. As Evy was not to change her name there was no doubt as to the

initials, and the widow, who was a beautiful needle-woman, took delight in making the "E. D.," as elaborate as possible.

After a *tête à tête* dinner, at which neither she nor May had any appetite, she went out for a walk, and May strained her eyes down the quiet street to watch for—her *fiancé* or the cablegram.

And in direct contradiction to the homely proverb that "watched pot never boils" Douglas and a telegraph boy reached the door together.

One glance at the orange-coloured envelope in the latter's hand sent May's heart beating wildly, and when Douglas had drawn her into the lobby room and shut the door, she handed him the telegram with a mute entreaty—open it herself she could not.

"Thank Heaven they were not married yesterday," cried Douglas fervently, and then he read the message to May.

"If only mother will believe it. I wish Uncle Peter had sent it himself. Who is George Harcourt?"

They were still discussing this when Sarah came to say a gentleman wished to see Miss Dale on urgent business.

"He's come about a cablegram, he says, Miss." Douglas followed May into the drawing-room; a pleasant-faced young man stood awaiting her.

"I am a clerk in the house of Porter and Co.," he said quietly. "We have for many years been the English agents of Mr. Peter Dale, of South Africa; just as the office was closing a cablegram came asking us to see you at once. It is impossible to say much in such a message, but Mr. Porter gathered you needed some advice that he could give."

"Miss Dale is my future wife," said Mr. Carew quietly, "perhaps you will let me explain the circumstances," and he told him the story of Evelyn's engagement and the message just received from Africa. That to Porter and Co., was more brief,—"Send instantly to Miss Dale, Spencer Villars, Florence-road, Herne Hill, give all information as to late Benjamin Dale."

"He is dead," said the clerk, gravely, "of that there is no doubt; indeed, I heard of it from a young fellow who was with him at the last and returned to England in July. Mr. Bryan Derwent had a heavy remittance from Mr. Dale which our house was instructed to honour; if a perfect stranger may offer an opinion, Miss Dale, I should say this very Bryan Derwent was the man who has represented himself as your cousin."

"I can't explain, but I fancy as you and your sister are the late Peter Dale's next of kin, he may deem it an advantage to marry one of you. Peter Dale was in a dying state when Derwent left the Colony. Derwent was in a lawyer's office, so may have gleaned the contents of his will if it is drawn in your favour; the rest is clear."

A knock at the door; May reeled and almost fell but Douglas caught her.

"Courage, my darling. Will you go upstairs? I will send Evey to you, telling her you are not well. Mr. North," turning to the clerk, "and I will have it out with Benjamin Dale, *alias* Bryan Derwent."

And it was not such a hard task as they expected. When once the scoundrel saw the face of the man who had paid him Mr. Dale's draft he knew the game was up. He never denied that his name was Derwent, but he declared Evelyn loved him too well to forsake him because of the deception; she would still marry him and endow him with her fortune.

"That is for the future to decide," said Douglas. "Now go! If you won't go peacefully we shall be at the trouble of ejecting you."

To her life's end May thought it a Providence that Mr. and Mrs. Ward should choose that afternoon for calling in Florence-road.

The kindly man who had been Mr. Dale's best friend undertook the task of enlightening the mother, while his wife shared May's watch by Evelyn.

"One thing is certain," said Mr. Ward when poor Mrs. Dale was calm enough to hear reason, "however much infatuated the child is with that scoundrel, you must not let her see him till you have received the letter from Africa. If her uncle has made her an heiress and tied the

money up carefully, Derwent may perhaps behave decently to her if she marries him; even then it would be a risk, but if she is not rich it would be certain misery."

And the long expected letter proved that Evelyn was so far from rich that her name was not even mentioned in her uncle's will. A hundred thousand pounds came to his niece Maria, and similar amounts to Mr. Harcourt and the eldest son of Lucy Dale's brother, the Rev. George Carew.

Mrs. Dale was deeply hurt.

"You and Douglas will be as rich as Croesus," she said to May, angrily, "and Evey has not a shilling."

"Mother, dear, I would give up half my fortune gladly to Evey, but I know it would only place her in Mr. Derwent's power. You know that while I am rich she shall never be poor, but I can't do anything that would send that man back to her."

There were no conditions or restrictions as to the bequests, so when May had been down to the Rectory for a month and been made much of by Mrs. Carew and the girls, a very comfortable arrangement was made.

A small estate with a commodious mansion was purchased with fifty thousand pounds of May's fortune, and settled on her and her heirs for ever. The remainder of her money was invested in securities to produce two thousand a year, one half of which she would pay over to her mother and Evelyn; the other would be her own for pinmoney.

Douglas insisted on his father's accepting a similar allowance from him to that paid by May to Mrs. Dale, and he declared if Evelyn recovered from her infatuation for Bryan Derwent he would join with May in making a suitable provision for her; but while Mrs. Dale had such very tender, forgiving feelings towards the false cousin Ben, Douglas felt the only way to save them from the adventurer's clutches was to make their income a voluntary allowance instead of a fixed right.

Mrs. Dale and Evelyn declared they were far too nervous to bear the shock of another wedding, so May was married quietly from the Wards' house, and then she and her husband, after a month in the sunny South, went home to their new estate of Forest Royal in time to keep Christmas, and there in their pretty home Mrs. Douglas Carew makes her husband as happy as she made him in the old days when he came to Florence-road—A PAYING GUEST.

[THE END.]

## FACETIÆ.

"Did you deliver that telegram?" a clerk asked his messenger boy. "Oh, yes," was the reply; "only the man does not live in Abingdon-square, but in Charlton-street, and not on the ground floor, but up three flights of stairs, and not in the front room, but in the back yard; besides, his name isn't Johnson, but Thomson, and he isn't a man, but a woman, and she isn't a wood-turner; she's a trained nurse."

APPLICANT FOR INSURANCE: "No, sir, I neither drink nor swear; I don't go to the theatre or attend balls, and have no evil associates. I am at home always by ten o'clock, am a Sunday-school teacher, and my morals are above reproach. I never had a day's sickness in my life." Agent: "That is an extra, extra hazardous risk, young man, and we can't take it." Applicant: "What?" Agent: "No. The good die young, you know."

"I AM told that your husband plays poker every night at the club—plays for money, too," said an anxious mother to her married daughter. "That's all right. He gives me all his winnings." "What! Do you—" "And he always plays with Mr. Nextdoor." "What difference can that make?" "Mrs. Nextdoor makes her husband give her his winnings, and then she gives the money to me, and I hand her what my husband won from hers, and so we both have about twice as much money as we could get out of them otherwise."

HICKS: "Women are all alike, I believe."

WICKS: "What's up now?" Hicks: "There were two deaf and dumb women here begging, and it so happened that my wife began to play on the piano. Well, sir, the moment the music struck up those women began to talk!" Wicks: "A wonderful case." Hicks: "Not at all. It is impossible for two women to keep from talking when a piano is being played. Nothing strange about this particular case, therefore; but I've often wondered why they don't introduce piano music into our female deaf-mute institutions."

IN Liverpool recently a sentimental young lady from town was on the Cunard steamship quay, where she saw a young girl sitting on a trunk in an attitude of utter dejection and despair. "Poor thing," thought the romantic lady, "she is probably alone and a stranger. Her pale cheeks and great sad eyes tell of a broken heart and a yearning for sympathy." She went over to the traveller to win her confidence. "Crossed in love?" she asked, sympathetically. "No," replied the girl, with a sigh; "crossed in the Serbia, and an awfully rough passage, too!"

THE VALUE OF A SMART ANSWER.—The late Sir Henry Smith, long M.P. for Colchester, was a Tory of the old school, and among the advocates of reform his resolute opposition to all change gave him a reputation for folly and obstinacy which was not borne out by his real character. On one occasion he was canvassing in the presence of numerous friends, and, on asking a heavy-looking farmer for his vote, the man replied, "I'd vote for ye, Sir Henry, only ye're such a fool." "Fool, am I?" retorted Sir Henry. "Then I'm the very man to represent you!" This diamond shaft of wit went to the farmer's heart, and, with a loud guffaw, he promised his vote.

JANE: "Will you wear diamond's to-night, ma'am?" Recently married Giltonian: "Yes, Jane; you can get out the hexakisioctahedron and the octakisexahedron." "Yes, ma'am; but how shall I know them?" "Easily enough, girl. Just observe that the crystallographic axes join the opposite octahedral quoina, the trigonal axes the hexahedral quoina, and the axes of the orthosymmetry the tetrahedral quoina, and then you will see that the faces of the cube, the octahedron and the rhombicododecahedron truncate their quoina respectively. And do not forget my thermoelectric disacalenohe'ron, which you will find close to the dirhombhedron and the triakisioctahedron. Do you follow me?" "Well, ma'am, I think I can get as far as the try-a-kiss."

A YOUNG lady organist in a church in— was somewhat captivated with the young pastor of the church in the next street, and was delighted to hear one week that by an exchange he was to preach the next Sunday in her own church. The organ was pumped by an obstreperous old sexton who would often stop when he thought the organ voluntary had lasted long enough. This day the organist was anxious that all should go well, and as the service was about to begin she wrote a note intended solely for the sexton's eyes. He took it, and in spite of her agonized beckonings carried it straight to the preacher. What was that gentleman's astonishment when he read:—"Oblige me this morning by blowing away till I give you the signal to stop."

HE (earnestly yet timidly): "Miss Jones, I've been thinking of you all week long." She (blushing sweetly): "Have you really—of poor little me?" He: "And I've been looking forward to this meeting—er—ah—" She (reassuringly): "How nice of you to say so!" He: "With mingled hope—and fear!" She (gently): "I am sure you need fear nothing." He (more bravely): "Well, every man has one ruling passion in his life, and mine, I think, you must have guessed at by this time." She (archly): "I think I have." He (eagerly): "Well, dear Miss Jones, I came to night, wondering if I dare ask you—if I could persuade you—" She (tenderly but firmly): "I think you could persuade me to do anything." He (radiantly): "How kind of you to say so. Well, then, will you—can I rely on you to—to—coax your brother Tom to join our cricket club?"



## SOCIETY.

It is understood that the Princess of Wales and her daughters will spend most of October at New Mar Lodge, coming direct from Copenhagen to Aberdeen in the Royal yacht *Osborne*.

The Queen of the Belgians is very fond of music, and is a good pianist, and a performer on the harp. She has composed one opera, called "Wanda." The King hates music, and when the piano is opened he vanishes from the room.

The Duke and Duchess of Portland are settled at Langwell for the shooting season and have some near relatives staying with them. The Duchess of Portland is stronger, but suffers from weakness owing to the heat, which has been as intense in Scotland as here.

The new ruler of Kalat is Mir Mahmud, the eldest son of the deposed monarch, a young man who has had ample opportunity of studying the power of the English Government both during the Afghan War and at the camp at Rawul Pindi, where he paid a visit. He is a great sportsman, and has an admirable seat in the saddle. His title, by the bye, is merely the Wali.

ACCORDING to present arrangements at Government House, the Duke of Connaught will retain the Portsmouth command until Christmas.

The Duke and Duchess of Fife are settled at New Mar Lodge, Aberdeenshire, until the beginning of November. New Mar Lodge has been enlarged by the addition of a new wing, which will afford ample accommodation for a considerable party of visitors, and many other improvements have been carried out since last autumn.

The Duke and Duchess of York intend to place the foundation stone of the Missions to Seamen Institute for the Port of London at Poplar some time about the end of this month. The institute is part of a large scheme for the benefit of seamen of all nations, but the society very wisely intends for the present to undertake only what they have funds to complete. The Duchess of York is not—like the Princess of Wales—a good sailor. Her Royal Highness enjoys short cruises in good weather, but is not fond of the sea in any but the most favourable circumstances.

It is very sad that the Empress Frederick's youngest daughter, Princess Margarethe, who was only married last January, should so soon have had her married life clouded by trouble. Her husband, Prince Frederick Charles of Hesse, has been suffering very much from bad eyes, and now it is feared that his sight may be seriously impaired. There are few more terrible afflictions that can befall one than the loss of eyesight, and the greatest sympathy is felt throughout Germany for the young couple, who are deeply attached to each other.

The Queen will entertain a succession of visitors in her "dear paradise," Balmoral, during the next three months, the Duke and Duchess of York being two of the earliest. In harmony with the policy of perpetual change which marks all Royal movements nowadays, the visit to Fredensborg was abandoned at the eleventh hour, owing to the not unnatural desire of the Duke and Duchess to avoid being once more the centre of a curiosity which is somewhat trying, even though it may be called by a pleasanter name.

The Empress Frederick was very anxious at our the health of her daughter, the Crown Princess of Greece, and remained with her until after the birth of the little Prince. Her Majesty will spend the autumn at Cronberg, where she will be near her second daughter, Princess Adolphe of Schaumburg Lippe, who is just now rather delicate. The Empress may visit the Queen at Balmoral during the late autumn, but it is quite uncertain. Prince and Princess Frederick Charles of Hesse, the Empress Frederick's youngest daughter and son-in-law are expected on a visit to the Queen at Balmoral next month.

## STATISTICS.

THE largest apes have only 16 ounces of brain; the lowest type of men have 39.

THERE are 15,170 free schools in England and Wales, with 3,429,577 children.

It is stated, on good authority, that a fashionable dress designer in the West End of London makes, on an average, between £5,000 and £6,000 a year.

SOME German scientists have recently furnished information in regard of the ages of trees. They assign to the pine-tree 500 and 700 years as the maximum, 425 years to the silver fir, 275 years to the larch, 245 years to the red, beech, 210 to the aspen, 200 to the birch, 170 to the ash, 145 to the alder, and 130 to the elm. The heart of the oak begins to rot at about the age of 300 years. The holly oak alone escapes this law, it is said, and there is in existence near Aschaffenburg, in Germany, a tree of this kind which has attained the age of 410 years.

## GEMS.

THERE is nothing so beautiful as beautiful manners. Perfect courtesy is the flower and fruit of all perfect breeding. It is the one all-potent and all-determining quality, and, when fulfilled to the utmost, it touches within the limits of that which is divine.

No motive, however apparently good, should tempt us to deny what we believe, or to pretend to agree with that from which in our inmost minds we dissent. Whether we shall openly proclaim them and push them into notice is another matter which judgment and wisdom must decide; but nothing can excuse the weak dissiminator who, through fear or interest, perverts his real thought and sails under false colours. No permanent good is gained for self, no real service is rendered to others, by hypocrisy in any of its shades.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

LINDEN MUFFINS.—One pint flour, one and one-half teaspoonfuls baking powder, one tablespoonful sugar, a little salt, one egg, small piece of butter. Mix with milk to a stiff batter, and bake about twenty minutes in muffin rings or pans. This quantity will make ten muffins.

SYRUPS FOR ICED DRINKS.—One pound sugar, 1 breakfastcup water, 1 oz. citric acid, flavour with lemon essence. Boil sugar and water, add the acid and flavour, and boil a few minutes longer—say quarter of an hour in all. Should be boiled in a porcelain-lined pan as the acid draws a bad taste from an iron or tin one. Citric acid is better for the stomach than tartaric acid. Colour this with a little burned sugar or saffron. Strawberry syrup is made the same; flavoured with strawberry essence, and coloured a beautiful red colour with a little cochineal or carmine. The above is a good proportion, and any quantity can be made at a time.

TO STEW PIGEONS.—Two pigeons, bit of carrot and of turnip, 1 onion, a sprig of parsley, a bay leaf, a blade of mace, and a few cloves, 2 breakfast cups of stock. Empty the pigeons and slit them in halves lengthwise—that is, cut them up the backbone and cut them up the breast—wash them very well, and also clean all the giblets; put the carrot and turnip (a small bit of each) in a stewpan—cut up a little—add the bay leaf, the onion, parsley, mace, and cloves, pour in the stock; put the pigeons on the top of all that; put on the lid, and let them stew for at least one hour, till they are tender. If stock is not to be had, use water, and put in the giblets, which will make stock. When ready take out the pigeons, and stand them neatly on a mound of mashed potatoes, add 1 teaspoon of flour, and 1 teaspoon of butter to the gravy in the pan, boil it a few minutes, strain it, and pour round the pigeons.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE human heart is the most powerful pumping machine of its size ever made. It throws into the arteries 7½ tons of blood per day.

A PROCESS of eliminating smoke from the combustion of coal has been discovered by an ingenious German.

THE months in which the greatest number of deaths occur on an average are: December in England, January in France, March in Germany. The spring is most fatal in England, France, and Austria, whilst in Holland the autumn is the season most fatal to human life.

THE Japanese have a plant called "omoto," whose growth and condition are believed by many of that curious race to typify the marriage state. When a young couple of "believers" marry they carry with them to their home a specimen of the omoto, plant it, and carefully tend and watch it, in the full confidence that so long as it shows healthy development the permanence and prosperity of the marriage fortunes involved are positively assured.

JAPANESE gardens are the most fairy-like of places. You see in them tiny trees and flowering plants, ponds, bridges, summer-houses, lanterns—here dwarf pines six or eight inches high, but one hundred and twenty-five years old; there are others one foot high, but five hundred years old. In the garden of Yeiugin, within the temple grounds, there are many peony plants, mostly old, but one is one hundred years old, and is eight feet high—quite a tree.

THE custom of Chinese wearing pigtails is not so very ancient. It dates from 1627, when the Manchus, who then commenced their conquest of the Celestial Empire, enforced this fashion of doing the hair as a sign of degradation. The average queue is three feet long. There are 200,000,000 adult Chinamen, so that their united pigtails measure 112,636 miles—a sufficient quantity to go four and a half times around the earth, and with enough over to hang a l the murderers in the world for the next 50 years, using a couple of yards of material for each operation.

THE British Museum contains many rare and beautiful snuff-boxes of the last century, plain and enamelled, made of papier-mache, horn, silver and gold, simple and complicated, small and large. Curious materials were sometimes used in the manufacture of these boxes. Some 60 years ago potato snuff-boxes were in common use. They were made of potato-pulp, which, mixed with some glutinous material, was pressed into moulds, dried, varnished, and slightly fired. The best quality of potato boxes was made at Brunswick, and hence they were sometimes known as Brunswick boxes.

JUST as the Spaniards worship their little king, so the Dutch follow with the liveliest interest the life of the little Queen Wilhelmina, now in her fourteenth year. Her portrait has the place of honour in most drawing-rooms of the better classes, not only because she is the Queen, but because the well-grown, tall figure, with the blonde hair and soft expression of countenance, constitutes the nation's idea of female beauty. Her Majesty, who is of a lively and engaging disposition, is being educated directly under her mother's supervision, but she has an English governess and several expert teachers.

JAPAN possesses a remarkable timepiece. It is contained in a frame three feet wide and five feet long, representing a noonday landscape. In the foreground plum and cherry trees and rich plants appear in bloom; in the rear is seen a hill, from which flows a cascade, admirably imitated in crystal. From this point a thread-like stream descends, encircling rocks and islands in its windings, and finally losing itself in a stretch of woodland. In a miniature sky a golden sun turns on silver wire, striking the hours on silver gongs as it passes. Each hour is marked by a creeping tortoise. A bird of exquisite plumage warbles at the close of the hour, and, as the song ceases, a mouse sallies forth from a neighbouring grotto, and scampering over the hill to the garden, is soon lost to view.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**A. C. B.**—The Bible was the first printed book.

**BEVEL.**—Pink or some delicate rose tint might suit her very well.

**HARMER.**—The length of the Suez Canal is eighty-eight miles.

**INQUIRER.**—France is believed to be the best cultivated country in Europe.

**MAY C.**—Perfectly white cats, if they have blue eyes, are nearly always deaf.

**POOR BELLE.**—It would be better to consult a local doctor, and get him to examine them.

**HOWARD.**—A scratch team or crew, is a team or crew selected at random.

**CONSTANT READER.**—Tattoo marks are absolutely indelible. Once tattooed always tattooed.

**IGNORANT.**—The wife of the reigning sovereign would have the title of "queen."

**JULER.**—Gas balloons can be constructed to carry as many as twenty passengers.

**D. F.**—No length of absence legalises a second marriage until the first husband (or wife) is dead.

**PATER.**—Your son is too young to be taken in the Royal Navy yet. The age is 15 to 16½.

**BLANCHE.**—At a dance, or ball, on entering the supper room, a lady should take the right arm of her partner.

**A. B.**—A verbal notice is sufficient, if it can be proved.

**ELISE.**—(1.) May 10th, 1880, fell on a Monday. (2.) We should advise you to make inquiries in your neighbourhood, as we never give trade addresses.

**SUBSCRIBER.**—No marriage with a deceased wife's sister is legal in England, nor has the woman any legal claim upon the man.

**MILDRED.**—The only advice we can give you is to go to a good dentist, and allow him to do what is necessary.

**CONSTANCE.**—If the Duke of York has no children, then at his death his sister, the Duchess of Fife, would stand next in succession to the Throne.

**JACK TAR.**—If you take our advice, you will not go to sea at your age. We fear you would never excel as a sailor. Boys begin at from 13 to 16 to learn.

**X. Y.**—Peaches were cultivated in ancient Babylon four thousand years ago. They are a development of the almond.

**PROGV.**—Tie a piece of bread in a bag and drop it into the pot where cauliflower or cabbage is boiling to absorb the odour.

**B. T.**—It does not appear to be definitely ascertained precisely what degree of heat a human being can endure, and live.

**INEXPERIENCED NURSE.**—To keep ice in the sickroom overnight, set the pitcher in a newspaper, gather up the ends, twist them tight, and snap on a rubber band.

**DOLORES.**—In fainting fits, place the patient flat, and allow the head to be lower than the body. Sprinkle cold water on the face.

**REGULAR READER.**—If the presents were personal gifts to the young lady they cannot be recovered by the giver from her legal representatives on her death.

**LETTY.**—Russian tea is a most refreshing and cooling summer drink. Milk, of course, is omitted and sugar added to the hot tea, with a slice of lemon.

**ETIQUETTE.**—No, it is decidedly not the "correct thing" to take a friend with you when you are paying a formal call—even on an "at home" day.

**MATILDA.**—Florida housewives use oranges instead of soap in scrubbing floors. They cut the fruit in two and rub the pulp on the floor. It is found to be very cleansing.

**JOHN BULL.**—If the wife becomes chargeable to the Union the husband would be liable for her support unless he had grounds for divorce proceedings against her.

**ADMIRER OF THE READER.**—The familiar remark, "The schoolmaster is abroad," originated with a distinguished English statesman, Lord Brougham. It occurs in a speech delivered in 1828.

**DELICATE DOROTHY.**—Chloroform is decidedly hurtful to the system—in fact, it is so dangerous that it should in all cases be administered by an experienced medical man.

**SIMPLE TED.**—The banns must be published three times in the parish church of the parish in which each of the parties live, and the officiating minister at the wedding may require a certificate of the publication in the other parish.

**T. SUMMERS.**—In Germany, when the vote of the jury stands six against six, the prisoner is acquitted. A vote of seven against five leaves the decision to the court; and in a vote of eight against four the prisoner is convicted.

**A. WARNER.**—If you have a good voice, go to some of the leading churches and seek an interview with the choir-master. Good voices are in demand, and you will have but little trouble in making arrangements if your voice promises well.

**STUNTED JIM.**—All you can do to assist your growth is to take sufficient plain, wholesome diet, avoid stimulants, such as liquor and tobacco, do a daily bath, and have moderate exercise; football is usually too violent, and therefore hurtful.

**THIRSTY OWL.**—Lemonade is a beverage that may be taken in excess. A glass of it now and then, particularly in summer, is cooling and healthful and thirst-allaying. Used in excess, like soda, it injures the coats of the stomach and puts too much acid in the system.

**F. B.**—Two parts of soft water, one pint of alcohol, mixed together; soap a sponge well, dip it in the mixture, and rub a breadth at a time on both sides, stretching them on a table. Sponge over again with clean warm water, and iron on the wrong side while warm.

**JOVE.**—The reason why some kinds of trees attract lightning more than others, is chiefly on account of their shape. Thus the tall erect forms of both oak and poplar are extremely likely to attract the thunder-clouds.

**POOR TED.**—There is no reason why you should not renew your proposal on your return. If you care for each other sufficiently to do so. It will give you very little trouble to satisfy yourself as to the state of the young lady's feelings as well as your own.

**ANXIOUS INQUIRER.**—A baked lemon is said to be an excellent remedy for hoarseness, and one that is often resorted to by singers and public speakers. The lemon is baked like an apple, and a little of the heated and thickened juice squeezed over lump sugar.

## WANTED—A CAREER.

"Oh, to do something," my heart kept repeating—  
"Something so beautiful, noble, or fine,  
That bright it should bloom like a flower in the desert;  
That clear like a star in the night it should shine!"

Then I looked in the sky: 'twas a quiver already  
With star upon star, through the glittering night;  
I looked o'er the land: 'twas a flutter with flowers;  
What need of my wee one to make it more bright?

Then I looked in my heart and I saw 'mid its motives  
What from my own vision I gladly would hide;  
Commingling with longings for art and for beauty,  
Ah, much of ambition, of envy, of pride!

Then I looked where no star-beam e'er comes penetrat-  
ing,  
Where the flowers are crushed out in the unceasing  
strife,  
The pitiful struggle for merest existence  
That mockery makes of the thing we call Life!

And I gave to a child that was walling with hunger  
The comfort, the beauty of every-day bread;  
To a soul that was starving for sympathy's music  
A commonplace word of encouragement said.

Oh, rich this new field for my thought and my labour,  
And soothed was my longing for beauty and art,  
For a flower sweetly bloomed on my own barren path-  
way,  
A star softly rose in my own shadowed heart!

M. C. M.

**BELLE.**—Wash your face at night with buttermilk, let it dry on, and wash off in the morning; the application may have to be several times renewed; or another simple plan is to pass a newly-cut lemon over the face, or to wet the face with the squeezed out juice of lemon.

**BUSY BEE.**—Four pounds of currants, four pounds of sugar. Pick the stalks and stems from the currants and wash them well. Put them on in a preserving pan with sugar, half a pint of red currant juice, and stir frequently till boiling. Allow them to boil for a quarter of an hour, then skim and fill into pots.

**SWEET SEVENTEEN.**—Straw hats may be cleaned with naphtha if they are only soiled from wearing and contact with the head. If they are discoloured from the sun or rain, they may be bleached by sulphur fumes. It is, however, better to send them to a professional cleaner.

**MISUNDERSTOOD.**—Young people are sadly given to thinking themselves something remarkable either for good or bad. Use a little common sense and come down out of the clouds. Try to educate yourself and make the best of yourself, and put all your vapourings and exaggerated ideas out of your head.

**A SCEPTIC.**—Generally speaking, one may educate the will to a degree of strength somewhat as one may educate the muscles. An untired, unformed will is of very little value when brought into conflict with stronger and trained ones. It is wise to discipline the will as well as other powers.

**INEXPERIENCED.**—Press out the juice of the grapes. With each half-gallon of juice mix one quart of boiling water and three pounds of molasses sugar. Let the mixture stand until all fermentation ceases and then bottle tightly. If the grapes are very sour use more sugar.

**DOLLY.**—The system of parish registration of baptisms was inaugurated in England in the reign of Henry VIII. by Lord Cromwell. The present law for the registration of births and deaths was passed through Parliament on the 17th of August, 1836. For England and Wales it was amended in 1874, and came into operation on the 1st of January, 1875.

**JO.**—So much depends upon the merits of the literary matter proffered for publication, as well as the reputation of the author of it, that it is difficult to average the compensation it brings. At present there is little or no demand for manuscripts of any description, especially by unknown writers.

**SCRIBER.**—Soak two ounces of Russian glue in water for some hours, then melt it over a slow fire. While melting add eight ounces of glycerine, a little whiting to make it of a whitish colour, and a few drops of carbolic acid. Stir it well and pour into a shallow tin tray. When cool it is ready for use. The ink is made with aniline crystals, spirits of wine, and gum arabic.

**E. S.**—Railway clocks are set to Greenwich time every morning, except Sundays. The time is telegraphed from Greenwich to the chief office on the railway system, and thence to every station in telegraphic communication. Those stations not in telegraphic communication get the correct time from the guards of passenger trains.

**FORSWORN BENEVOLENT.**—The bridegroom is expected to pay for the wedding-ring, of course, his own brougham, the bride's bouquet, the fees to the clergyman and clerk, and, in some cases, he gives a souvenir to each of the bridesmaids. The bride's father bears the cost of the carriages, the breakfast, a reception, and sometimes presents the bridesmaids with their dresses.

**MEO.**—The strict rule is that the lady should precede the gentleman both up and down stairs; he does what he can to provide free unimpeded passage for her; but it is quite conceivable that circumstances may occur in which it is not only desirable but imperative that the man should precede; the good plan is to let common sense guide the order.

**A MECHANIC.**—Every wheel on a Pullman car is made of paper. You do not see the paper, because it is covered with iron and steel. The body of the wheel is a block of paper about four inches thick. Around this is a rim of steel measuring from two to three inches. It is this steel rim, of course, which comes in contact with the rails. The sides are covered with circular iron plates, bolted on.

**A. L. O. E.**—The inventor of the spectacles is not known; they are understood to be mentioned by an Arab writer named Alhazen, who lived in the 11th century, and in all probability were first produced among the Arabs; they are also referred to by a monk named Roger Bacon in 1214, and two Italian monks—Alessandro di Spina, Pisa, 1318, and Salvini Dogli Amati, Florence, 1317—are both credited with inventing them.

**AN INJURED WIFE.**—Women frequently reach correct conclusions intuitively, and put to shame the strong-minded, self-opinionated man who can only arrive at the same end by the most laborious exercise of his reasoning faculties. But women are not constituted mentally alike, and men are not, as a rule, to be blamed for not soliciting the counsel of their wives, unless they have manifested on occasions that called for it their aptitude for solving business problems.

**FENELLA.**—If, on first entering the ear, it causes pain, a little sweet oil should be poured in and left there until the insect is smothered. The wax sometimes becomes hard, but if left to itself will generally dry and scale off. In no case should it be picked out with any sharp instrument, as deafness might be caused by it. The skin of the drum is easily pierced, and if thus injured serious trouble may be the result. If the ear really needs cleansing, it should be effected by syringing it with warm water.

**CAREFUL CARRIER.**—To wash and curl feathers, wash them first in warm soap-suds, and then rinse them in water a very little blued, if the feather is white. Dry it in the open air. Place a hot flat-iron so that you can hold the feathers just above it while curling. Take a bone or silver knife and draw the fibres of the feather between the thumb and the dull edge of the knife, taking not more than three fibres at a time, beginning at the point of the feather, and curling one half the other way. The hot iron makes the feather stay in curl some time.

**ONE IN A FIX.**—No honourable gentleman will break an engagement with a young lady without, at least, giving her some reason for it. There are, doubtless, engagements which it were better to break than to keep, on the ground of incompatibility of temper, lack of congeniality, and change of mind as to the suitability of the match; but where these causes do not exist, it is mean and contemptible for the man to withdraw himself entirely from the presence of the woman for whom he had professed to have great affection, and who, in turn, had bestowed upon him her fondest love.

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